THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A HOUSE BOAT

BY

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BY

WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF "THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A PHAETON," ETC.

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THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A HOUSE-BOAT.

CHAPTER I.

"Quoth I, 'My bird, my bonnie, bonnie bird,
Is that a tale ye borrow,
Or is't some words ye've learnt by rote,
Or a lilt o' dool and sorrow?'

"'Oh, no, no, no,' the wee bird sang,
'I've flown since mornin' early;
But sic a day o' wind and rain—
O! wae's me for Prince Charlie!'"

On this still morning, while as yet the unknown world around us seems but half awake, there is a tall young lady, of slim and elegant figure, standing all alone in the stern of the boat. It is the Person without a Character. She has perched herself on the steersman's plank; her arms are placed on the transverse

iron rod; her chin rests contemplatively on her crossed palms. And who can tell what dreams and reveries may not be in the calm deeps of her eyes, which can be thoughtful and wistful enough when they are not full of malice, and wickedness, and downright rude insolence (to persons older than herself)? Apparently she is looking away across the undulating landscape, with its varied features of wood and meadow, of hedgerow and upland slope, emerging from the pale mists of the dawn; but there may be quite other visions before her. Perhaps she is thinking of the olden days of romance and heroic adventure, when noble earls "came sounding through the town"; perhaps she is only thinking of New York, and of some facetious and correctly-dressed young man there. When one civilly bids her good-morning, she turns round with a startled look: clearly her thoughts have been far away.

"Well," she says, "the more I see of England, the more I am surprised to think how such a wonderful lot of things should have happened in so small a place. And not only small, but—but—empty. The country seems dead. There's nobody in it. Last night I was reading about Warwick and

Kenilworth, just by way of preparation, you know, for I suppose we shall get there this evening. Well, where did all those great lords find the people to build splendid castles for them? Where did they get such sums of money? Where did all the armies come from that were in the Wars of the Roses?"

Now the spectacle of a young mind in eager quest of knowledge is, as has been observed before, a pleasing sight; but it has to be pointed out to Miss Peggy that the study of English history ought to remain prohibited during the remainder of this trip, to avoid misconception, and for the better silencing of scandalous tongues.

"Ah, now," she says, plaintively, "isn't it hard that we should be subjected to such cruel taunts and suspicions? And so unjustly, too; that is the shameful part of it; if there was the smallest atom of foundation for the things they say of us, I shouldn't mind. I do really believe," she continues, with an air of solemn conviction, "that you and I are the two most absolutely perfect characters the world has ever known. I have never met with anyone just *quite* so good as we are. And of course that is the explanation. Perfect people are never properly com-

prehended. Their motives and conduct are always being misunderstood and misrepresented by the outside world: other people who are not perfect have to console themselves by being spiteful and envious. The only comfort is," adds Miss Peggy, complacently, "that you and I understand and appreciate each other; and they are welcome to say all those things about us as often as they please."

This was all very well; and indeed it was satisfactory to think that one had won the commendation of a being so confident of her own moral worth. But there was this to be considered about Peggy—that you could never be very sure of her. Indeed, when she was most amiable she was most to be distrusted; when she held out both hands to you in the frankest fashion, you had to beware lest they should turn out to be the two knobs of an electrical machine.

The next instant, with immovable face and inscrutable eyes, she remarks, in a casual kind of way—

"Mr. A'Becket is coming to Warwick."

"What!"

"Yes, he is."

"Well, you are—I declare you are——."

"I?" she says, with a blank stare of innocence. "What have I to do with it?"

"Then how did he tell you and no one else of his coming?"

"Oh, as for that," she says, in a careless fashion, "he only mentioned it in going away—as a kind of possibility. If he had spoken of it to you, it might have looked like asking for an invitation. And perhaps he mayn't come, after all. I'm sure, if I were he, I wouldn't take the trouble."

"Probably not."

"I say," she continues, with a sudden change of manner (for she can be very friendly and confidential when she likes), "what made your wife look so strange last night when Mr. Duncombe was talking about Alfieri, and the Princess, and Prince Charles Edward?"

This was a large question, and one rather difficult to answer offhand; but just at this moment, as it happened, we were unexpectedly interrupted. There was a barge coming along, drawn by two donkeys, each with a nose-tin slung at its head; and along with them was a tall young bargeman, as handsome as Apollo, but with a sun-tan on his face and a mild fire in his eyes unknown to the marble figures in the Uffizi corridors.

After a preliminary and rather diffident glance at the young lady, he made bold to ask us whether we were going on that day?

"Yes, certainly," was the answer.

"Then you'll have to make haste," said the sun-browned Apollo, "for they're going to repair Claydon Lock, and unless you get on at once, you won't get through till to-morrow."

Now, this was most unwelcome news; for, though it was well enough, once in a while, to spend a whole twenty-four hours by the side of a meadow, with speedwells, dandelions, pollard-willows, swifts, water-rats, and an occasional sheep, as our only companions, still we felt that we had not been making sufficient progress, and we had certainly calculated on reaching Warwick that night. So there was nothing for it but to summon Murdoch forthwith, and bid him leave breakfast alone, and go and scour the neighbouring country in search of Captain Columbus and the Horse-Marine. Of course, all this commotion had been heard within. Mrs. Threepenny-bit made her appearance at the bow, and said she would hang the whole ship's company if she wasn't safely deposited in Warwick town that very evening. Jack Duncombe popped

out his head astern, and said that as soon as he had got his boots on he would go off and help to find our crew—in Cropredy they would be most likely, he added. In the midst of all this, Columbus, the horse, and the Horse-Marine simultaneously hove in sight; Murdoch, having espied them, at once returned to his duties in the pantry; and in the shortest time possible we were again under way, stealing along through the silent landscape.

Now, why was this young man so dense as not to see that on the previous evening he had grievously displeased his hostess by his flippant description of the fallen estate of Bonnie Prince Charlie? On this succeeding morning, at breakfast, he must needs revive the unlucky subject; and the moment he began he ought to have perceived that he was addressing Miss Peggy alone—Queen Tita preserved a proud silence, and would have nothing to do with him or his impertinent projects.

"The fact is," said he, with a pleasant facetiousness, after he had been reviewing the subject all over again, "that there is something just a trifle too farcical in the scene in which the dissipated old blackguard finds his

young wife spirited away from him—there is a Palais Royal touch about it that I shall have to steer clear of if I meddle with the thing at all. You see, this is how matters stood: the conspirators—that is Alfieri, and the Irishman, and his lady-friend, Madame Orlandini—they knew they would have some difficulty in getting the Princess safely away and into a convent, even after they had got the permission of the Grand Duke; the elderly husband had to be dealt with, and he was as jealous and as suspicious as the very mischief. Very well, this was how they managed: one morning Madame Orlandini called upon the Princess and her husband and asked them to drive with her to the convent —I forget the name of it—to see some articles manufactured by the nuns. It was a casual kind of visit, you understand. But when they got to the convent who should be there but the Irishman—quite by accident, of course—and as he was there any way, he naturally escorted the ladies up-stairs, leaving the Prince, who was fat and scant of breath, to follow as best he could. He did follow, and reached the landing; but the two ladies had disappeared; there was no one there but the Irishman, pretending to be very angry

that he had been shut out. Then your Bonnie Prince Charlie—I suppose he was beginning to suspect a trick—began to knock violently; and all the answer he got was that the Abbess appeared at a small grating and civilly informed him, from behind it, that his wife had been received into the convent and was now under the protection of the Grand Duchess. They say his rage was tremendous when he found out how he had been cheated; but the irate husband doesn't get much sympathy, especially if he is fat and elderly, and given to drink and beating his wife."

You should have seen Queen Tita's face all this time: she was far too indignant to speak.

"And did the Princess remain in the convent?" Miss Peggy asked—she being apparently as unobservant as himself of the effect produced on their hostess by this happy-go-lucky recital.

"Oh, dear, no. The Pope allowed her to retire to Rome; and the carriage she drove in was guarded by an escort of horsemen, with Alfieri and the gay Irishman, both of them disguised and armed, on the box. I don't know that her husband ever saw her again. Why he didn't appeal to the Pope, I can't understand. Perhaps he wasn't in good

odour—I suppose his habits were too notorious——"

How long was this to go on? In order to get him away at any hazard from this fatal topic, one ventured to hint that, from the point of view of literary morality, it was perhaps hardly quite fair to make a real person like Alfieri the hero of a romance or a play.

"Oh, as for that," said the young man, immediately and happily rising to the lure, "you know the private lives of the great poets have always been considered common property in the world of letters. Didn't you ever read the novel about Milton and his second wife?—I think it was the second one. Why, Shakespeare has figured in fiction, both in Germany and England, in every possible condition of life—as a young lover, as an actor and boon companion in London, as a country gentleman living quietly in Stratford. I've seen Voltaire on the French stage—a representation of himself personally, I mean. I don't see much difference between writing about them and painting them; and you get a picture of Shakespeare in his cradle—well, that *is* playing it pretty low down—and you get Dante wandering through the air

with Beatrice. My belief is that Alfieri would have been very much offended if you had considered him a private person. He left his own memoirs——"

"Yes; and told us all about his life and his literary career that he thought it necessary should be known. Isn't that enough?"

"I wouldn't say it in print," continues this young man, confidentially; "I wouldn't sign my name to it in a review; but my private impression is that Alfieri has long before now been made a figure in literature. If 'Don Juan' wasn't suggested by some of Alfieri's earlier adventures—then I will eat my hat."

(This is the fashion in which young people of the present day discuss grave literary questions.)

"My belief is," continues our ingenuous young friend, as he contemplatively chips another egg, "my belief is that poetical genius is based on nothing more nor less than an infinite capacity for falling in love. What makes a bird sing? Alfieri says himself that it was always when he was in love with some woman or another that he produced his finest work—it was the desire to shine in her eyes that was his inspiration. Of course you want a certain amount of imagination to fall in love

—I suppose the mass of mankind go through life without ever knowing what really being in love is, and without ever knowing that they don't know. But when you come to the people of great imagination, see how they can fall in love again and again—look at Goethe, at Burns, at Shelley, at Byron, at Milton—— "

"At least," says Queen Tita, sharply, "Milton had the grace to marry the women he fell in love with."

"Well, it isn't everyone who gets the chance of marrying three times," says this young man, with cool effrontery. Miss Peggy looks amused, but keeps her eyes downcast. Mrs. Threepenny-bit, addressing Murdoch, who happens to come into the saloon, asks him to write out a list of any things he may want in Warwick. She adds that we shall have our meals at an hotel to-morrow, so that he may have the more time to look over the town and the castle. For there is one person on board to whom she is always civil; and that is because he is a Highlander.

Well, we got through Claydon Lock easily enough; and thereafter entered upon a long stretch of eleven miles without any lock at all. This was by far the most lonely district

into which we had as yet penetrated; and as the canal is here on a high level, we had a sufficiently spacious view of the richly-cultivated but apparently uninhabited country. Far as the eye could reach there was nothing visible but fields, hedgerows, and upland heights, with here and there a clump of trees or perhaps a solitary barn, a bit of red showing pleasantly enough among the prevailing greens. The day was brightening up, too; sweet, mild airs were blowing; there was even, now and again, a ray of watery sunlight striking on some distant slope. We began to wonder whether we had at last escaped from the rain that had pursued us so incessantly; for of course we did not want our pretty Miss Peggy to go away back to America with the impression that England was a land of perpetual mists.

One thing was certain: neither mist nor rain nor any other kind of weather was likely to upset that young lady's equanimity. She would have proved an invaluable acquisition on board the Ark, if she had been given her banjo, and her knitting, and perhaps, also, a young man or two to make a hash of, just by way of filling in the time. On this breezy, soft-aired morning, the uncertain look about

the weather had no fears for her. She was the first to be ready to leave the boat for a stroll along the bank. But she was not the first to get ashore; for Queen Tita called on her to wait; and Miss Peggy, sitting down complacently, amused herself by strumming "Oh, dem golden slippers!" until her friend was ready to join her.

And very soon, when all of us had got on land, we discovered Mrs. Threepenny-bit's dark design in thus carrying off the young lady all to herself. She was going to undo the evil that Jack Duncombe had done; and she happened to be very well qualified for the purpose. In the absolute silence of this uninhabited district, we two who were following could hear distinctly enough; and what we heard was an elaborate discourse on the character, career, and sad misfortunes of Prince Charles Edward Stuart, accompanied by such an abundance of minute detail and anecdote that even Miss Peggy was surprised, and was forced to ask her friend how she came to hear of all these things.

"Well," we overheard her say, "I suppose it was partly through our knowing the Camerons of Inverfask, and being interested that way; but all kinds of narratives and

journals have been published, so that the whole story of Prince Charlie's adventures in the Highlands has been told, down to the smallest circumstance. What became of him after, or what he became—well, I never heard much about that; but what I do know is that there must have been something very extraordinary and fascinating about the character of a man who was able to do what he did. Fancy his landing at Borrodale with only seven companions—the Highland chiefs on whom he most depended entirely opposed to the enterprise—the people not knowing him even by sight; and yet within a couple of months he had got together an enthusiastic army, had taken Edinburgh, had beaten the English General sent against him, and was fairly on his way to London. Surely the young man who could do that must have been possessed of some unusual qualities: don't you think so, Peggy? From the very outset it was one difficulty after another to get over; anyone with less courage and resolution would have given up the whole affair—anyone with less personal fascination of character—for it all depended on that—could have done nothing with men who tried from the very beginning to get him to go back. Boisdale—

he was one of the Macdonalds, I think—went to see him even before he landed, and begged him to return to France. Young Clanranald assured him that the project was quite hopeless. Why, when Cameron of Lochiel—and everybody says there would have been no rising at all but for him—when he set out to meet the Prince he was as much opposed to it as any of them; and yet his brother, Cameron of Fassiefern, knew quite well what would happen if he came under his influence. Lochiel had to pass Fassiefern on his way—some day, Peggy, I hope you and I will have a drive along Glenfinnan, and I will show you all the places—and Fassiefern came out and tried hard to stop him. 'Brother,' he said, 'if the Prince once sets his eyes on you, he will make you do whatever he pleases.' Of course Lochiel yielded like the others; and it was this same Lochiel—the 'gentle Lochiel'—long afterwards, after Culloden, when Prince Charlie and he and the rest of them were exiles in France—it was that same Lochiel who hung back from accepting the command of a French regiment that was offered him, and kept urging the Prince to make another effort in Scotland. And you think that this young Charles Stuart—coming almost alone

to the country—could have induced those men to risk their lives, their estates, and the prospects of their families, without his having most unusual qualities of character—yes, and force of will, and personal courage as well?"

Now, it is to be observed that Miss Peggy had brought no such charge; she was listening to this laudation of Prince Charles with the most amiable attention; plainly the taunt was thrown out for the benefit of anyone who might be listening behind.

"Peggy," she continues (the arms of these two are interlinked, and they are supposed to be in very private confabulation together; but nevertheless we hear every word), "I wish we could get Colonel Cameron to come along with us for a few days, just to show you what kind of men they were who joined the Young Chevalier. I think he is every way fit to be a kinsman of 'the gentle Lochiel'; but, gentle or not gentle, the Camerons can fight. And I suppose fighting is to be his trade to the end now. Poor Inverfask! I am quite sure he had always the idea of leaving the service as soon as he could afford it—for he is not very well off, you know—and settling down on his small place in the Highlands, and making what he could of it. I suppose

he would take a command in the local militia; and if the place swallowed up too much in the way of improvements, I dare say he would have let the autumn shooting to some rich Liverpool or Manchester man. But his young wife died—what a dear, gentle creature she was!—and so I dare say he will stick to his soldiering to the end. Well, at all events, when we get back to London, we must arrange an evening for him to come and dine with us; and then you will see the kind of man who went 'out' in '45; for of course a generation or two can't have made much difference in the blood, though all the circumstances are different. Do you know what blood was in the veins of Prince Charles Stuart?—the blood of John Sobieski; and he showed himself worthy of it. But still there must have been some extraordinary personal glamour about this young man that captured everyone he came across, rich and poor alike. The women, of course you know, all went mad about him; though they weren't all quite so lucky as Miss Edmonstone——"

"Who was she?" the innocent disciple asks; whereupon Mrs. Threepenny-bit smiles a little: perhaps she is trying to imagine Miss Peggy in Miss Edmonstone's place.

"That was when Prince Charles was marching south from Perth. The gentlewomen in the neighbourhood of Doune had come out to welcome him and offer him some refreshment; and it was the daughters of Mr. Edmonstone who were to serve him. Well, when he had drunk the wine and returned the glass, they asked to be permitted to kiss his Royal Highness's hand; but there was a cousin of theirs standing by who said she would rather 'pree his Royal Highness's mou'.' Perhaps this was a little joke on her part; perhaps she counted on his not being able to understand—and he didn't understand, any more than you do, Peggy, my dear; but the speech was immediately explained to him by his companions, and at once he stooped down, and lifted the young lady in his arms, and kissed her heartily. So if it was a joke, she was paid out for it; but they say the other ladies of the district were very envious and thought she had got more than her share. They say, too, that his manner towards women was just the perfection of courtesy——"

If, at this moment, Jack Duncombe had dared to say a word he would probably have muttered, "Yes; especially when he was beating his wife"; but the smallest remark

would have been overheard; so he was compelled to go in silence, listening to this wild eulogium of Prince Charles—a eulogium that was not only in a manner levelled at his own head, but that also effectually deprived him of all chance of enjoying Miss Peggy's companionship during this morning's stroll.

"He invariably rose whenever Flora Macdonald entered the room, no matter what business was going on. They say that when he was at Holyrood his charm of manner quite won the hearts of the young Scotch ladies, and that numbers of them—like Miss Lumsden—bade their lovers go and fight for Prince Charlie, or give them up for ever. Yes; and some of them gave him more substantial aid. Did you ever hear of Colonel Anne, Peggy?"

"No," answers Miss Peggy.

And here again the small mite of a woman laughs a little; for she has a prodigious and heroic valour of imagination, though she will skip on to a chair at sight of a black-beetle.

"She was the wife of Mackintosh of Mackintosh; and while he was a Captain in the loyal Militia, she raised a whole regiment for the Chevalier—of her own clan and the Far-

quharsons; and joined them herself. The joke of it was that her husband was some time afterward taken prisoner and brought into her presence. 'Your servant, Captain,' she said. 'Your servant, Colonel,' he answered. There is another story told about her that will show you what spirit she had. After Culloden she was taken prisoner and sent to London; but they set her free before long; and the Duke of Cumberland invited her to a ball, and to the ball she went. Very well; the first tune played was 'Up and waur them a', Willie,' and Cumberland asked her to dance with him, which she did; then she said, 'Now that I have danced to your tune, will you dance to mine?' Of course, he couldn't refuse; and what must she do but call for 'The auld Stuarts back again!' Well: she had her revenge; but still—still, I think I would rather not have heard of brave Colonel Anne dancing with Butcher Cumberland."

Here the rampant little Jacobite was interrupted by a distant sound that gradually came nearer and nearer and increased and increased until we knew by the whirr and rattle that a train was going by somewhere, though we could not see it. The disturbance was quite startling in the silence to which we had grown

used; we resented it almost; it was a message from the far-outside world to people who had forsaken it, and almost forgotten the existence of railway-stations, and porters, and hansom-cabs. But presently the hubbub had ceased; stillness reigned around; we were left alone once more with the silent woods and meadows, the placid water, and the pale sunlight that here and there warmed the upland slopes, under the darker sky-line of the trees.

"Then there was Lady Kilmarnock," continues this furious partisan of five-foot-three (and all this is for the pious edification of Miss Peggy, who has been tampered with by heretics); "she didn't raise a regiment; but I don't know that she didn't do Prince Charles a greater service still. Well; well, Peggy, it's a terrible story of a woman's duplicity; I know *you* would not do such a thing, even for a Prince Charlie. But she happened to be at Callander House when General Hawley and his English troops arrived to drive away the Highlanders from the siege of Stirling; and on the very morning of the battle of Falkirk she sent an invitation to General Hawley to come and breakfast with her. I think he might have suspected; Lord Kilmarnock was with the Prince; she was known to be a warm

adherent of the Stuarts. However, she was very good-looking and very charming; and Hawley thought he could drive the Highlanders away just whenever he pleased; and so he went. Yes, Peggy, he went; and it was a bad day for him that he did. Even when his own officers sent him word that the Highlanders were in motion, he wouldn't come away from Callander House. They say that Lady Kilmarnock had very pleasant manners; and of course she would talk about something interesting—history, perhaps—English history, perhaps—do you hear, Peggy?"

"Yes?" says the young lady, innocently.

"By mid-day," the duodecimo historian continues, "Prince Charles had made all his arrangements for an attack; and the English were without their General. He was still at Callander House."

"And what was the end of it?" asks Miss Peggy.

"Why, the English lost the battle of Falkirk, that was all; and General Hawley, who had been enjoying the interesting conversation of Lady Kilmarnock all the morning, was in the evening in full retreat towards Linlithgow."

"Ah, I see," observes Miss Peggy, gravely.

"You might say that he had run his ship fast aground—opposite Magna Charta island."

"Yes," observes Mrs. Threepenny-bit—who is far too eager in her proselytising to heed this piece of impertinence, "the women of Scotland did what they could for Bonnie Prince Charlie! I wonder, Peggy, if I could get for you some account of the homage they paid to Flora Macdonald when she was at Leith, in the ship that was taking her a prisoner to London. Whole crowds of ladies, many of them persons of great distinction, went to see her, and took all kinds of presents with them. One of them said, 'I could wipe your shoes with pleasure, and would count it an honour so to do.' Another said 'Surely you are the happiest woman in the world.' And another—Lady Mary Cochrane that was —stayed on board all night, and begged Miss Macdonald to let her share her cabin, so that she might say that she had had the honour of lying in the same bed with one who had been so happy as to be guardian to her Prince. And even that was nothing to the enthusiasm that Flora created in London, after she was set free, and living as the guest of Lady Primrose——"

"Hi! You people in front there! What

is all this farrago about the '45 Rebellion? What are you trying to prove?"

Mrs. Threepenny-bit turns round for a second.

"I am trying to prove," she says, with audacious calmness, "that it is impossible for Peggy to go back to America without having met Colonel Cameron: she must see what a Highlander is like."

It was about mid-day that our Argonauts were greatly surprised—and perhaps a little bit cheered—by espying in the far distance a cluster of human habitations. Perched on the top of a hill was a conspicuous toy of a church; and along the slopes and trending down to the valley was a straggling mass of houses and cottages, the red brick and blue slate of which gave the place an odd purple look in the middle of the wide green landscape. It was the village of Napton, we learned, where we were to leave the Oxford canal and turn off westward by the Napton and Warwick. But before reaching the junction we had of course to descend from the high level that had yielded us so (historically) interesting a walk; and as the operation of going down a hill, by means of a series of canal-locks, is just a trifle tedious, we abandoned our noble vessel to the care of

Captain Columbus and the Horse Marine, and took refuge in the saloon, where luncheon was already laid out.

Now it is just possible that by this time our young Dramatist had begun to perceive what a fatal mistake he had made the night before; but he need not now have proceeded deliberately to make matters worse by proposing modifications of his unhappy scheme. He would have been much wiser to have said not one word more about the unlucky book or play, whichever it was to be. He was clever at dressing salads, and opening cases of tinned meats; and might have confined himself to these useful occupations. But no. Perhaps it grieved him to see Miss Peggy so completely carried off from him, to be lectured about the Highland clans. Perhaps he thought that by currying favour with this Jenny Wren of a Jacobite he might hope to have a little of the younger lady's companionship restored to him. At all events, we had scarcely sat down at table, when he began, quite jauntily and airily—

"Well, Miss Rosslyn, what do you think of the young Chevalier now? I heard you were being shown a different picture of him this morning. Oh, yes, there is much to be said on

that side; and I dare say, at one period of his life, he must have been rather an attractive and interesting kind of personage. Of course I take the later period—my story happens then; and it is necessary for my purpose that there should be a dark foil to the brilliant character of Alfieri—the darker the better. And yet, you know, if I should ever take up the thing, I don't think I would represent Bonnie Prince Charlie, even in his later days, as being absolutely contemptible"——

(This was the young man's idea of putting matters straight!)

"——no, not absolutely contemptible. I would have glimpses of his former self appear through his drunken stupor; I would make him maunder about his brave Highlanders, and all that kind of thing, don't you know. My private impression is that it was his brave Highlanders who taught him the use of the whisky-bottle—still, I suppose when they were skulking in the hills they were glad to get anything—and he must have come through a good deal of privation when he was being hunted from island to island——"

And at last Queen Tita breaks silence; she can bear this no longer.

"Privation!" she says, with a touch of

indignant tremor in her voice. "Yes, privation such as might make people silent with pity over whatever he became towards the end of his life. I don't know what that was; I would rather not inquire; I suppose few have ever experienced such cruel disappointments and mortifications; and I don't know what habits he may have acquired in these later years; but I do know this—I know that when he was crossing from Uist to Skye, they had with them only half-a-bottle of white wine—it was all the soldiers had left at Clanranald's house—and he would not touch it: every drop was to be saved for Flora Macdonald. And I know that when Malcolm Macleod was guiding him across Skye, and there was only one glass of brandy, he made Malcolm drink it, as needing it more than himself. I remember," she continues, turning to Miss Peggy, as if the young man were no longer worth talking to, "being told where that bottle is still preserved, for Macleod hid it in the heather, and picked it up afterwards. Well, there is this to be said, Peggy: that in all the privations they had to go through—starving for days sometimes, and sleeping in wet caves at night—the Prince always kept the most undaunted heart of them all. He would turn his hand to any-

thing—kindling a fire, cooking a dinner when they had anything to cook, hauling a boat up on shore, or singing songs to cheer the sailors when they were dead-beat with their rowing. Old men, who had fought for him at Culloden, and made their way back to the glens, burst into tears when they found him in such a pitiable plight; but he was always stout-hearted and cheerful and making the best of his circumstances. And very ungrateful he must have been, in these later years, whatever he was, if he did not think sometimes of his brave Highlanders. Such loyalty, I do believe, was never seen before. Imagine those poor people, each one of them knowing that he or she could go and get £30,000 by telling the nearest Captain of Militia where the Prince was hiding, and not one of them yielding to the temptation! Why, at Coradale, in Uist, there were more than a hundred people knew quite well where he was, and not one of them would betray him. The very officers who were searching for him could not help admiring such faithfulness. Just think of this, Peggy—there was a poor fellow called Macleod—Macleod or Macdonald, I forget which—who had piloted the boat the Prince escaped in, and he was taken prisoner, and brought before

General Campbell. He confessed at once to having been with the Prince. 'Don't you know,' said the General to him, 'what money is put on that gentleman's head? No less than £30,000, which would have made you and your family happy for ever.' 'What, then?' was the answer of the poor fellow. 'What though I had gotten it? My conscience would have got the better of me, and I would not have enjoyed it two days. And although I could have gotten all England and Scotland put together, I would not have allowed a hair of his head to be injured, since he was under my care.' Do you know what the General said, Peggy? He said, 'I cannot much blame you.' And surely you cannot think that such extraordinary devotion could have been aroused except by one who had some very unusual qualities of character? Mind you, it wasn't merely their loyalty to their chiefs. When young Clanranald hesitated at the beginning, his clan told him they would go out, whether he headed them or not. No, I don't seek to know what habits the disappointed and unhappy man may have fallen into in his last years; but it was no mean or contemptible person who could awaken such loyalty and devotion; and, what is more, it

was no mean or contemptible person who, even after his misfortunes, was so much of a hero to the people of Paris that the French King himself was vexed and envious because of his great popularity and the admiration and sympathy that were shown for him. Mr. Duncombe, you may turn the Young Chevalier into a drunken old reprobate, if you like; but I think you will make a mistake; for one thing, you will get no one to believe you."

This was a pretty warm defence of the last of the Stuarts, coming as it did from a small mite of an Englishwoman who had picked up her Jacobite sentiments simply through having stayed on one or two occasions at Inverfask House and been told something about the relics in the hall there. And as Jack Duncombe was beginning to make a few feeble excuses—saying he might not take up the subject at all—and that, if he did, he would introduce reminiscences of the hapless Prince's more heroic days—suddenly a shaft of sunlight shot into the saloon; and, that being always a welcome signal, it was suggested by one of us to Miss Peggy that she might come outside and take the tiller, and see a little more of this country of England.

Despite that stray shaft of sunlight, how-

ever, we found the day had not improved during our sojourn within; there was now half-a-gale sweeping over from the south-west; the yellow waters of the canal were driven into lapping waves; and a reservoir hard by—near to Stockton Grange it is—was changed into a miniature sea, with white foam springing from its embankments. It was all very striking and picturesque, no doubt—the bent and swaying trees, the hurrying clouds with their purple shadows and silvery lights, and the occasional gleams of sunshine that struck here and there on spinney or hill; but we began to wish, in the most modest and respectful way (and especially as we should be wandering through the Forest of Arden within the next day or two) for just a trifle of decently quiet weather. We were *not* landscape artists. We had promised ourselves still moonlight nights in these remote districts, with Miss Peggy and her banjo at the bow of the boat, trying to charm the fairies out into the open glades with a kind of music they had never heard before. But now we were encountering nothing but a series of juvenile tornadoes; and we were beginning to feel annoyed.

Nevertheless, that evening improved very considerably; the wind abating; the clouds

banking themselves up into heavy masses overhead; while along the western skies there were silver rifts that seemed slowly and steadily widening. Indeed, the heavy darkness overhead made that white glory in the west all the more vivid and alluring; and when, at length, through some sudden parting of the clouds, a flood of sunlight swept across the corn-fields and the hedges and the daisied meadows, the effect was quite bewildering. It was Miss Peggy who was at the helm. She insisted that she could not see, the glare was so strong. So we had the boat stealthily stopped; Murdoch was quietly summoned; those people within—the one of them letter-writing, the other, no doubt, inventing situations sufficient to make a Strand audience gasp with emotion—were left to themselves; and the two congenial souls on board this ship—the two who were not likely to let their friendship strike and founder on any idiotic rock of historical sentiment—were free to walk away by themselves into that western world of light, conversing on subjects so serious and exalted that it would be a pity to put them down here, lest they should be misunderstood.

The evening drew on apace; but momen-

tarily it became more beautiful. It really seemed as if we had come out from under those lurid storm clouds into a region of mellow radiance and perpetual calm. The still surface of the canal was a golden pathway before us; overhead, such spaces of the sky as were now clear were of a pale blue, just touched here and there with a flake of saffron cloud. Of course, this brilliancy could not last. Slowly the wild fires in the west paled down. As we drew near to Radford Simele (we were all on board again now) there was a wan twilight on the water; and as we stole through the outskirts of Leamington Priors the windows and lamps gleamed orange through the gathering grey dusk.

Night came down. We passed under mysterious bridges. Here and there a mass of black building or a tall chimney rose into the faintly lilac sky; here and there a yellow ray of light burned in the dark. We could hear, but barely see, our noble Captain and his crew as they made their way through the prevailing gloom. And then it seemed to us as if we were passing into the country again. Where was Warwick? We knew that it was but a mile or two from Leamington; but here were we among meadows, with no more sign

of a town than we had met with on the lonely level between Claydon Lock and Napton Hill. In the midst of our perplexity, the Nameless Barge—that has been coming through these sombre shades as noiselessly as a bat—slowly ceases to move; and Captain Columbus appears with his report.

We must remain where we are, it seems; for the next lock-gate is locked. Warwick is three-quarters of a mile away, across the fields. Then comes the question, put to the popular vote, as to whether we should make our way into the town (there is a moon somewhere behind the clouds, and those meadows are beginning to show grey, with the hedges black between) or spend the evening on board, with such entertainment as we may be able to devise for ourselves. It is unanimously resolved that we remain on board.

Late that night, Mrs. Threepenny-bit happened to bethink her of putting postage-stamps on the letters that had occupied her in the afternoon; and while doing so she pushed one of the envelopes across the little table to Miss Peggy.

"There, Peggy, do you see to whom I have been writing?"

The young lady took up the letter and read

the address, "*To Colonel Sir Ewen Cameron, V.C., K.C.B., Aldershot Camp, Hampshire*"; and upon her asking what "V.C." meant, her hostess seemed quite proud to give her the information. But with regard to the contents of the letter (which one of us made bold to suspect were the concrete result of all the vague historical squabbling that had taken place during the day) the astute small person chose to hold her peace.

CHAPTER II.

"And in that Manor now no more
Is cheerful feast and sprightly ball;
For ever since that dreary hour
Have spirits haunted Cumnor Hall.

"The village maids, with fearful glance,
Avoid the ancient moss-grown wall;
Nor ever lead the merry dance
Among the groves of Cumnor Hall.

"Full many a traveller oft hath sighed,
And pensive wept the Countess' fall,
As wandering onwards they've espied
The haunted towers of Cumnor Hall."

"Your servant, Colonel!" says a tall and slim young lady, as she appears at the door of the saloon, and makes a very fair imitation of a military salute.

But if Mrs. Threepenny-bit — or Colonel Anne, as she is supposed to be—has any wish to check the young person's impertinence, it so happens that she has just had the means placed at her disposal.

"Look here, Peggy," she says, "Mr. Duncombe has been over to the town, and was kind enough to ask for letters. This one is for you; and the post-mark is Oxford."

"Oh, thank you," Miss Peggy says to the young man; "I'm sure I never should have thought of asking for letters at Warwick: I told them Stratford-on-Avon; for I suppose we shall stay there a day or two."

"But, Peggy," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit again, "the post-mark is Oxford: what friends have you in Oxford?"

"It may be a bill," she says carelessly, as she takes the envelope in her hand and proceeds to open it, "though I thought we had paid for everything. Oh, no, it's from Mr. A'Becket."

She ran her eye over the two or three pages in a negligent fashion.

"Oh—he can't get away at present—did I tell you he spoke of coming over to Warwick to see how we were getting along?—and—and there are some inscriptions in a church in Bath that we are to look at—and Gloucester Cathedral—coloured figures on tombs—oh, I dare say we shall find all that in the guide-books. Then there are kind regards and remembrances to everybody—that's all."

She put the letter into her pocket with a fine air of indifference. Mrs. Threepenny-bit said not a word. Murdoch came in with breakfast; and presently we were all at table.

Now, Miss Peggy was in the highest of spirits; perhaps because of the unwonted brightness and cheerfulness of the morning, perhaps because she was looking forward with an eager interest to this ancient town we were about to enter. All her talk—which chiefly consisted of questions—was of earls, and tournaments, and crusades; of Simon De Montford, and Piers Gaveston, and "the black hound of Arden"; of pleasances, and moats, and battlements.

"It will be just splendid!" she exclaimed. "Oh, you don't understand a bit—you can't understand: why, all that mediæval time reads to me like a fairy tale; it is so far away; it isn't real; you can't believe in it. But when you come to see the actual walls—the towers built by So-and-so and So-and-so—the tilting-yard—the gardens—the great kitchens—and all that, then you begin to think that the things actually happened, and that the tremendous festivities really took place. Say, now, how big must that round table have been that could let a hundred knights and

a hundred ladies sit down to dinner all at once?"

Naturally we looked to Jack Duncombe for the desired information. He was smart at figures; the calculation was not an abstruse one; and he ought to have sympathised with the laudable curiosity shown by our young American friend. Perhaps he did not hear; perhaps he was in a resentful mood; anyhow, he took no notice of her question. Indeed, it was patent to all of us that throughout this meal he was most unusually pre-occupied and silent; and when, some time thereafter, we had packed a few things together, and were ready to set forth for the town, he did not offer to accompany Miss Peggy (who was first ashore as usual) but hung behind and followed with his hostess. So far as we could hear, the conversation between these two was of a somewhat intermittent character—though Queen Tita was as courteous as ever; for her quarrels are soon over, and not a word had been said about Prince Charlie all the morning.

But as for this Rosslyn girl, as we walked along the pleasant country road towards the town, she appeared to have taken leave of her senses altogether. Perhaps the unaccustomed

sunlight had got into her brain; perhaps she was enjoying a fierce delight in her release from the strict surveillance that hemmed her in on board the Nameless Barge; at all events, a dafter lassie could not that morning have been found within the shores of these three islands. It was conundrums she was busy with. Where she had got them—or whether she had made them herself—it was impossible to say; but about her implacable persistence in propounding them there could be no doubt. Short of throwing her over the fence there was no way of escape from her. And what a diabolical ingenuity ran through those insanities; and with what an amiable innocence—with what serious, scarcely-smiling lips, and grave, sweet eyes—she continued her maddening questions!

"Come, now, I will give you an easy one——"

"Oh, go away with you!"

"No, but really this is a very simple one—even you might find it out. Come now, have a try. I wouldn't give in, if I were a man; I would have a try, anyway. I thought men never were afraid of anything; at least they pretend never to be afraid."

"Sometimes they are. Sometimes they

are afraid of being bitten—when they find themselves in a lonely country road, with a creature gone mad."

"I suppose you think that is sarcasm. Well, never mind. Tell me this, now—Why is Lord Wolseley the most extraordinary General that ever lived?"

"Oh, what do you know about Lord Wolseley!"

"I ask you a simple question, and you can't answer it. Men think themselves so clever—and yet you can't answer that! Well, I'll tell you. I'll have pity on you. I wouldn't leave you to worry your head all day about a simple thing like that. It's because he not only took Cairo, but Damietta."

"Look here, young lady, let me give you a solemn warning: those people are not more than six yards behind, and if you don't take care, you'll be getting 'what for.' How would you like to be sent back to the boat, and shut up on bread and water?"

"I did think you could answer a simple question," the demon continues; but suddenly she alters her tone. "Well, now, what kind of a building is that?"

We had come in view of a remarkably handsome structure, close to the roadside, but

most picturesquely embowered in foliage—the fragrant lilac-trees, in full blossom, being chiefly conspicuous.

"I should say it was a jail."

"A jail? Oh, I suppose they ought to make the outside of a jail attractive. That's moral. The outside of a jail ought to be the most attractive side of it. Say, don't you feel a kind of satisfaction in going past a jail—on the outside?"

"I don't know that I do."

"That isn't the feeling you have? Perhaps it's rather more a kind of surprise?"

"Very good—very good; we are getting on. This is what the young people of the present day call manners. This is their respect for age. I shouldn't be surprised to see two she-bears come out from behind those bushes and rend you in bits."

"I say," she continues—just as if this suddenly confidential appeal were the most natural thing in the world, "what is the matter with Mr. Duncombe?"

"You, most likely."

"What do you mean!"

"Well, he may have been forming exalted ideas of the feminine character—young men are soft-headed enough to do that sometimes,

you know. And then—and then—he may have seen a young lady unblushingly open a letter—yes, and read the contents aloud, too—a letter from a middle-aged Oxford Don whom she has bamboozled out of his senses in the course of a couple of evenings. He may have been shocked by such a display of callousness——"

"Oh, nothing of the sort. Don't you make any mistake," says Miss Peggy, with decision (and it may be admitted that she has observant eyes). "There is something troubling him—something serious."

"Perhaps it's Prince Charlie."

"Well, how could he be so stupid as to bring up that—that absurd story again and again when he ought to have seen he was vexing your wife?" says Miss Peggy, who seems to have recovered her sanity. "And I'm sure she is right. There must have been something fine and heroic about the young Prince; or he couldn't have won the hearts of all those people in such a fashion. I think—yes, I think if I had been with those Edmonstone girls, I should have been a little bit envious, too—of the cousin, I mean."

"Really? Another convert to the white cockade?"

"What do you think, now, about that letter last night?" she continues. "Do you think she has asked Colonel Cameron to come and sail with us for a bit?—you know she was hinting at it."

"More likely she has written to tell him we shall be returning through the southern counties, and asking him if he would care to ride over from Aldershot, when we are at some near point, and lunch with us. That is more likely, I fancy. But why do you ask? Have you any curiosity about him, simply because he is a Cameron, and related to some of the people who were out in the '45?"

"Why, of course!" she says, with a quick glance of surprise. "It makes all those things seem so much more near and actual. But I don't think I could ever get you to understand—I mean, how it strikes anyone brought up in America. By-the-way, sometimes I hear your wife speaking of him as 'Inverfask': is that the way he is ordinarily addressed?"

"No, not ordinarily. His neighbours in the north would call him 'Inverfask.' Then the people on his own place speak of him as 'The Cornel.' Then he is 'Ewen' to his family; and 'Cameron' to his intimates, and

'Sir Ewen' or 'Colonel Cameron' to acquaintances: so that you have plenty of variety, you see."

"And you always put 'V.C.' on the envelope, if you are writing to him?" asks this diligent student of old-world ways.

"Generally."

"Is he so very proud of it?"

"There is not much vanity about the Cornel. But the Victoria Cross is the proudest thing that an Englishman can wear; and it is open to any soldier to win—the private in the ranks as well as his officer."

"For some special act of courage in battle?" she continues thoughtfully. "I think if I were a man I should be proud to have that; and you might say it was vanity if you liked. It is curious what different ambitions people have. I suppose, now, what Mr. Duncombe mostly thinks about is being called on the stage after the production of a play, and having all the critics praise it next morning."

"If Mr. Duncombe doesn't mind," one says to her, "the critics will arise and tear him piecemeal. I hear he has been writing an article on the present lamentable condition of the British drama, and no doubt he puts all

the mischief down to those bold, bad, heartless men."

"What is Colonel Cameron like?" she asks, with a suddenness which shows how little concerned she is about the condition of the British or any other drama.

"When you see him, you will probably call him a long, red-headed Scotchman—that's about all."

"Rather blunt—and—and overbearing, is he?"

"Overbearing! He comes of the same stock as 'the gentle Lochiel.'"

"And yet the Camerons are a fighting race, aren't they?—there are so many references——"

"Oh, yes, they have done a little in that way—now and again—during the past century or two."

"I should like to see him," she says simply; and then her attention is claimed by the buildings of the town of Warwick, which lies before us.

And, indeed, it is quite a pleasant task to be cicerone to this young American person, as we go along these wide, quiet, old-fashioned streets; for her quick appreciation of anything shown her—especially if it have any kind of

historical interest—needs no spurring; while she herself has a sharp eye for any ancient gateway or similar relic surviving among more modern stonework. Moreover, she is now introduced for the first time to the Warwickshire cottage of brick and timber, with its overhanging eaves, its peaked gables, and its casements studded with small green panes. And nothing will do for Miss Peggy but that to one of these old houses—to this one, she says, or that one over there—William Shakespeare used often to come on a visit, or perhaps on business. Of course he would ride over from Stratford (she says) and come up this very street; and pull up his horse just there—by the side of that causeway; and give the bridle to a lad to hold; and then go up those steps to the door. Would that be the same knocker—that knocker there? Or most likely, in this quiet place, the door would be open; he would simply walk in, and call for the people of the house.

"Yes," said Miss Peggy, contemplatively. "I think he would have rather a loud voice—being good-humoured and merry—and the people mightn't be there—he would call for them. And of course the first thing they would do, on recognising the voice, would be

to hurry away one of the maids to fetch a jug of ale and some cakes. Cecily or Dorothy, it might be, and I suppose she would run quickly. I should, if in her place——"

"Peggy, whatever are you staring at?" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, happening to come up at this moment.

"Oh, nothing," the girl answered—rather absently—and went on again.

But when it came to be a question of churches, choirs, monuments, mural inscriptions, and so forth, one found one's occupation entirely gone. It was Miss Peggy who was guide. It was she who took us to the tomb of Thomas Earl of Warwick, and knew all about his having fought in the Holy Land, and at Cressy and Poictiers. It was she who discovered for us the sarcophagus bearing the words—"Fulke Greville, Servant to Queen Elizabeth, Counsellor to King James, and Friend to Sir Philip Sidney." And when we came to the two marble figures of the Earl and Countess of Leicester, she knew that it was not the hapless Amy Robsart who was lying there in the silence, her hands clasped in stony prayer, but Leicester's third wife, Lettice Knowles. We had no idea that this young American stranger had been so diligent

a student. It quite reconciled us (after many long years of abstention) to figuring in the capacity of tourists. And her interest in these old things was so fresh, so natural, and so unstinted, that it was beautiful to look at. Even when we had got back to our hotel to lunch, she was all eagerness and chatter about what she had seen and what she was going to see.

But the equanimity of our small party was now about to receive an unexpected shock. We were discussing plans. We had discovered that the Avon is not navigable between Stratford and Tewkesbury; and so had resolved to get round to the Severn by the Warwick and Birmingham Canal. Meanwhile we could certainly get by canal as far as Stratford; but as we should have to turn back there, it was proposed, in order to avoid going over this part of the route twice, to send on the Nameless Barge under care of Captain Columbus, while we should run through to Stratford by rail (thus giving Miss Peggy as much time there as possible) and then join the ship again, to continue our voyage northward and westward. What, then, was our astonishment, to hear Jack Duncombe calmly say to his hostess, who had been putting some questions to him—

"I am afraid, if it comes to that, I must ask you to leave me out. I—I am very sorry—but I fear I shall have to go back to London. Of course, it isn't like breaking up the party—you can easily get some one to take my place. I assure you I am sorry enough to go, for the trip so far has been most delightful; and you will soon be getting to even more interesting districts; but I think—yes, I think it will be safer if you count me out."

For a second there was an awkward silence; Mrs. Threepenny-bit seemed afraid to ask him the reason for this sudden resolve.

"I hope it is nothing serious?" she ventured to say, however.

"Oh, no, I think not," he answered evasively; and then he added: "I should fancy you will find it all plain sailing now until you get to the Severn; and then you'll want a steam-tug or something of the kind to take you down to Bristol. I will get to know whether the Thames and Severn Canal is navigable, in case you should prefer to return that way, and drop you a line. The Kennet and Avon Canal, I know, is open."

He was talking in quite a matter-of-fact fashion; but he seemed depressed a little. Then, when luncheon was over, he said he

would walk along to the telegraph-office, and join us subsequently at the Castle, whither we were shortly bound. At the same moment Miss Peggy went away to her own room, to fetch her guide-books; and the instant she had shut the door behind her, Queen Tita was free to express her astonishment—and her suspicions.

"Now really do you think that wretch has been at her tricks again?" she demands.

"What wretch?—what tricks?"

"Why, what should he be going away for so suddenly if he hadn't quarrelled with her?" she says. "What other reason can there be? Oh, I know she was pretending to behave very well; and you would have thought there was nothing between them but ordinary acquaintanceship—well, I don't know—he has been very devoted—and all I cared about it was that no blame could fall on me—it would have been a very good match if it had been a match. But what can this mean? Surely he can't be so hard hit that he must needs be mightily offended because she has been amusing herself a little with Mr. A'Becket—and getting a letter or two——"

"You don't imagine he is such a fool; what could it matter to him her getting twenty dozen letters from Mr. A'Becket?"

"Oh, you don't know. She is pretty clever at leading people on—even when she pretends to be most innocent. And if it isn't that, what is it?" demands this creature again, whose very ignorance she brings forward as an argument. "However, if he wishes to go, I suppose we must let him go. And it would be such a chance to get Colonel Cameron to come along——"

"His Royal Highness the Commander-in-Chief might have a word to say," it is humbly observed.

"Oh, that's all right; they can always get leave," says *our* Commander-in-Chief. "That letter I posted to him this morning—well, it was only a general kind of invitation—asking him if he would care to come and see us *en voyage* at any point in the south there; but I could telegraph and tell him we had now a spare berth for him, if he wished to join at once. He will get the letter to-morrow, I suppose? We shall be at Stratford. Wouldn't that do very well, if I telegraphed from Stratford to-morrow or next day?"

Now observe, that is the gratitude of women. Here was a young man who had taken unheard-of trouble in arranging this

expedition for us, and who had promised himself in reward the enjoyment of a long idling holiday in this ghostly-nomadic fashion; and when he is suddenly arrested in mid-career, and signs an order for his own dismissal, she doesn't protest at all, or entreat him to stay, or make decent expression of regret—she immediately seizes the opportunity to send for a substitute more to her liking. And why more to her liking? Because she has some foolishly romantic sentiment about Bonnie Prince Charlie, and wants to convince her young American acquaintance—through being introduced to one of the Camerons—that Prince Charles Edward was a gallant hero, and one of the most hardly-entreated of mortals. Such is woman's gratitude—and woman's logic. Jack Duncombe might go if he wished and welcome, if only she could get Cameron of Inverfask to take his place. This was the result of our young Dramatist's unfortunate vaunting of his Alfieri project. Peggy must see the kind of men who went out in the '45 to follow the white cockade of the Chevalier. Nor had Mrs. Tom-tit any regard either for the interests of England; Sir Ewen Cameron must needs be summoned away from his serious duties at Aldershot—

all to convince this young minx of an American.

And when that daughter of the Stars and Stripes reappeared—as she did almost directly—one was almost ashamed to see how radiant, and cheerful, and self-complacent she was. Even supposing that she had nothing to do with the young man's so suddenly parting company with us, at least she might have affected some little sorrow. If compunction was out of the question, if her heart was incapable of experiencing any such emotion, at least she could have said it was a pity he was leaving. Had he not been her devoted slave all the way through? Had he not mended pencils for her, and tuned the banjo strings, and carried her wraps for her with the most patient assiduity? It is true she did casually mention his going, and expressed to us the hope that, whatever might be the cause, we should find him returning to the Nameless Barge later on in our wanderings. But she was plainly all eagerness to be off to Warwick Castle; and she got hold of Mrs. Threepenny-bit by the arm, and dragged her down the staircase and out into the open thoroughfare with an ostentation of affectionate companionship which was perhaps just a little bit un-

called-for. For, after all, they didn't know their way; and it served them right that they had to pull up and ask. One did not wish to triumph over them, of course—although Miss Peggy's glance of defiant malice had a sort of challenge in it—but still it was pointed out to them that the formation of secret societies was a futile thing as amongst women, and that they would do much better not to profess a mystery that didn't, and couldn't (by reason of their tongues) exist.

We found Jack Duncombe at the gateway, but before going in he begged the women-folk (for he still kept up the pretence of being their escort, despite his pre-occupied looks and his imminent departure), he begged them to accompany him a little way down Mill-street, where he assured them they would get a very striking view of the castle. Striking, indeed, it was; it almost looked as if it had been designed by a drawing-master: the great grey frontage, with Cæsar's Tower and Guy's Tower, rising into the pale blue and white of the summer sky; and all around the base of the mighty walls a kind of fringe of picturesqueness—the yellow waters of the Avon flowing between rich green meadows, a broken bridge whose buttresses were masses of ivy,

a dilapidated mill-wheel and some tumble-down old cottages of brick and timber. But one has observed before that it is rarely the picturesqueness of a place that attracts Miss Peggy; it is rather the human interest of it; and as we are walking back to the main entrance she says to the person who happens to be her companion for the time being—

"I suppose, now, you think I ought to be struck by the great age of a castle that was founded by a daughter of Alfred the Great. Well, it is quite the opposite. These things seem to bring far-back centuries quite close up; and you begin to imagine that the time has not been so long, and long, and long as it always appeared to be. I remember I used to think of everything you read about in the New Testament as having happened ages and ages ago—as being quite separated and away from us—it all seemed to have no kind of connection with the actual existing world: well, you come and see a place like this, standing before you, and you are told that King Alfred's daughter began to build the fortress in 900 and something—why, that's almost half-way back—half-way back to all that took place by the side of the Lake of Galilee. That seems very strange, somehow."

Her speech was rather incoherent; but one could make out some glimmering of what she meant. And it was also interesting to notice how, inside the castle—in those magnificent halls stored with costly treasures gathered from all parts of the world—she turned with comparative indifference from buhl and ormolu, from marqueterie tables and Indian bowls and Etruscan vases, to pay curious attention to the portraits. She would stand riveted before this one or that—Mary, Queen of Scots, it might be, or Anne Boleyn, or the Marquis of Montrose, or Charles I.—apparently striving to read into their features something of what she knew of their story. But, of course, she was greatly charmed by the situation of Lady Warwick's boudoir—with its windows overlooking the magnificent trees and the winding valley of the Avon; and here it was that Queen Tita came forward and took the girl by the hand and led her out on to a small stone balcony.

"Here is a view for you, Peggy," she said. "And, do you know, I am certain this was the kind of snug corner that Lady Mary Anne had all to herself, where she could look down on the young fellows playing at the ball. I suppose you don't know the old ballad?—

O Lady Mary Anne looked owre the castle wa',
She saw three bonny boys playing at the ba',
And the youngest among them was the flower o' them 'a;
My bonny laddie's young, but he's growing yet.

I think she must have been an audacious young lady—do you know what she said?—

'O father, O father, an' ye think it fit,
We'll send him a year to the college yet.
We'll sew a green ribbon round about his hat,
And that will let them ken he's to marry yet.'

But she was young herself—so says the ballad—

Lady Mary Anne was a flower in the dew,
Sweet was its smell and bonnie was its hue,
And the langer it blossomed, the sweeter it grew;
For the lily in the bud will be bonnier yet."

"And were they married when he came back from college?" asks Miss Peggy.

"Oh, I suppose so. But the ballad-maker doesn't wait to tell; it was the figure of the Lady Mary Anne in the balcony that took his fancy. And surely it must have been just such another balcony as this—opening from her own boudoir——"

"Who was she?" asks Miss Peggy, again.

"I'm sure I don't know. Perhaps she never existed. Perhaps she was nothing but a dream—a fancy of some rustic poet."

"Oh, no; it is better to think she was a real person—I don't care about dreams," says Miss Peggy; and therewith she comes in from the balcony—she and her friend—and they resume their slow perambulation of the splendid halls.

When we got back to our hotel—after having rummaged through one or two bric-à-brac shops, that are well known to lovers of useless furniture and cracked plates—we found a telegram lying on the table addressed to our young playwright. He took it up and opened the envelope.

"Yes," he said, "it is as I feared. I must go back to town to-morrow."

"So soon as that?" said Queen Tita; and —despite the fact that her small brain was busy with thoughts of the coming of Colonel Cameron—she managed to put a little decent regret into the words.

"Yes," he said, "it is rather a nuisance. You know, you have all been so kind as to let me engineer this trip in a kind of a way, and I should like to have seen it through. But really I don't think you will have any trouble now. There will be those long tunnels, of course; but Columbus should be able to get you through without difficulty. And in going

down the Severn you will choose a smooth day, naturally——"

"Oh, but don't look at your going from that point of view only," remonstrates Queen Tita, in a very kindly way (considering what he had said about Prince Charlie). "I have no doubt we shall get on well enough. But we had hoped you would be with us all the way along; it seems such a pity your having to break off in the middle."

"Yes, I don't much like it," said he—and surely, if any falling out with Miss Rosslyn had prompted his going, he was now acting indifference very well indeed. "You will be coming to the best of it soon. I should like to have passed a night or two in the Forest of Arden, in that vagabond way—and then going down the Severn—and the Kennet and Avon——"

Now here Miss Peggy thought fit to strike in. Perhaps her heart (if any) smote her a little. He had done his best to amuse her during all this time; he had let her into his literary confidences; had produced aphorisms for her; had (alas!) revealed to her his dramatic ambitions; and had told her the names of our English wild-flowers so far as he knew them, which was not very far. And so she says, as she is pouring out a cup of tea for him—

"But can't you come back later on, Mr. Duncombe? Why, it will be quite different without you. We shall feel quite lost and lonely."

"It's very good of you to say so," he makes answer (and, if he is offended with the young lady, he certainly conceals it admirably). "As for the coming back, the case stands this way. You ought to fill up my place—and you should have little difficulty if your friends knew what this way of travelling was like—I say you ought to fill up my place, for it is better to have an additional hand to take the tiller at times. Well, then, you see, even if I should come back later on, I should find my berth occupied——"

"But, look here, Mr. Duncombe," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, who, on the assumption that her Highlander friend will soon be with us, can afford to be a trifle generous, "if that were so, couldn't you manage somehow? I never knew any difficulty about making room for an extra person on board a yacht; and if a clumsy, unwieldy thing like this can't be hospitable, I wonder what it is good for."

"If it came to that," said he, "I could be with you during the day, and go off for lodgings at night, like Captain Columbus. He has

never failed yet to find some kind of a place, although Miss Rosslyn thinks that England is an uninhabited country. And I should certainly like to go down the Severn with you. I want to see how a house-boat will answer. In fact, I consider myself in a way responsible for your safety; and I don't want to hear of your getting into trouble—— "

"But do you think there will be any danger?" she said quickly—a question which, to do the small person justice, you would never have heard her put on board any yacht.

"I should say not," he answered. "There is sometimes a bit of a sea on in the estuary of the Severn; but she ought to ride out anything; and then of course you would keep all the doors and windows shut so that the wind couldn't get a purchase on her."

"For we mustn't drown Peggy in the Bristol Channel," she says.

"I would never speak to you again if you did," that young lady observes in reply.

Towards nine o'clock that evening, an open landau stood in front of the Warwick Arms; and presently two cloaked and hooded creatures, accompanied by a couple of shawl-bearers, came out of the hotel and took their seats in the carriage. The thoroughfare was

almost deserted on this still moonlight night; hardly any passer-by was visible along the wan grey pavements; though on the shadowed side of the street here and there a window shone a dull orange through the dark.

"I am almost afraid—I hope nothing will happen," said a girl's voice, in rather low tones.

"Why, what should happen?" her companion asked.

"Surely, if there are phantoms anywhere, it will be at Kenilworth Castle. Amy Robsart wasn't the only one Leicester murdered, was she?"

"Fancy Peggy being afraid of ghosts!" said the other—as the horses were sent forward, and there was a sharp rattle of hoofs and wheels in the silent street. "Why, Peggy, I thought you called them 'spooks' in your country. Well, you know, you couldn't be afraid of anything called a 'spook.'"

Presently we had left the last of the houses behind, and were out in the open country, where the moonlight was throwing black shadows from the elm-trees across the wide white road. There was not a sound anywhere; nor a breath of wind to stir the great overhanging branches. The wooded and

undulating landscape, touched here and there into a pallid grey, lay silent under the stars; we could not even hear the barking of a dog, telling of some distant farm. It was a strangely still world we were driving through, and we ourselves were not disposed to be over-garrulous.

At length we came to Guy's Cliff; but from the road, of course, there was nothing visible but a long and wide avenue of trees, with a modern-looking building—in dusky shadow—at the end of it. There was nothing here to tell of the warrior who had repented him of the slaughter he had wrought in honour of his lady-love, who came home and turned hermit, and who was tended in his holy retirement by the lady herself, who did not recognise him, fancying that her lord had died in Palestine. But Miss Peggy knew of the legend; and this at least was the neighbourhood in which the repentant Knight dug out a cell for himself in the solid rock, and lived and died in great sanctity. Then again, on the other side of the road, up among some trees on the hill-side, we could just make out a small grey object; and we guessed that to be the monument which marks the spot where Piers Gaveston, "the minion of a hateful King," was beheaded

some five centuries and a half ago. But the aim of our quest lay further on. And still, as we pursued our way through this silent landscape, the overarching sky remained serene and clear; all the circumstances were propitious for our visit; Miss Peggy was to see Kenilworth "aright."

And yet she could not have been in the least prepared for the startling beauty of the vision that suddenly declared itself before us as we swept round a turn of the road. We had driven through a long and straggling village that appeared to be fast asleep—a quite interminable string of houses and cottages it seemed—and had thereafter got into the country again, where our view was hemmed in by dark masses of foliage along the roadside. We had no knowledge of the neighbourhood, nor of the whereabouts of the Castle; and it was quite unexpectedly that, through an opening in the trees, we suddenly beheld a vast mass of walls and towers, silver-grey in the moonlight, and here and there blackened with ivy, and all clearly defined against the cloudless heavens. The vision lasted for but a second. The spectral castle in the moonlight disappeared. The next minute we found ourselves in a hollow, with the horses splashing

through a ford; then they slowly ascended a bit of a hill on the other side; finally, we pulled up at a gateway, and all got down.

Our coming had been expected, and there was no difficulty about obtaining entrance. But it was with no great speed that this silent little party made its way through the garden, which was filling all the night air with its varied scents. You would have fancied the women were walking on tip-toe; not a word was said. And then again, when they left this garden-path, and emerged upon the wide plateau round which are ranged the giant walls and towers and galleries, they seemed to hesitate. Was it not a kind of sacrilege to go forward?—the place seemed so still in this white light—so still as to be almost awful. Not a leaf stirred in the heavy masses of ivy that hung around the mullioned windows; no bat came flitting out from the mysterious corridors; no raven croaked from those mighty towers whose summits were with the stars. A phantom castle indeed; for the moonlight had robbed the ruddy stone of its colour, and it was now of a pale and silvery grey; and grey, too, was the sky that shone clear through broken archway and lofty loophole. The two women stood voiceless—themselves like ghosts

—though their shadows fell sharp and black on the grass. And then Miss Peggy, almost in a whisper, asked if we knew which of these was Mervyn's Tower; and we knew why she asked: it was in a chamber somewhere within the great mass of masonry now in front of her that the Countess Amy had sought shelter, a trembling fugitive and captive, writing a letter to her faithless lord, and tying it with a love-knot of her hair, while he was entertaining the proud Queen of England with masque, and pageant, and ball.

But of course considerations of mere sentiment could not be allowed to interfere with our affording our young American friend all the information and instruction in our power; and it was necessary—notwithstanding the impressive silence of the place, and the ineffable beauty that the moonlight threw over those imposing ruins—that she should begin and try to construct for herself some idea of the Castle as it was when Queen Elizabeth and all her courtiers and retainers were assembled to hold high revel within its walls. Jack Duncombe had brought a plan with him; and the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments would have shuddered at the audacity with which he set about the

work of restoration, not only connecting walls and completing towers, but decorating the Pleasance with statues and fountains and grottoes, and furnishing the Great Hall with oaken roof, and tapestries, and brazen chandeliers, and waxen torches. The younger of the two women listened; but she looked more than she listened. It was plain that a certain eerie feeling still hung over both of them; and when they were bidden to ascend a certain part of the building, and enter a chamber there from which they could see the moonlit landscape all around, they seemed to regard with a kind of suspicion, if not with actual dread, the long black galleries which were so strangely silent.

"I suppose you never saw Millais's 'Grey Lady'?" Queen Tita said to her companion. "No? It is two or three years since it was exhibited, and I don't know where it is now. But I thought it was very fine—though the critics didn't seem to care much for it——"

"The critics!" said Jack Duncombe (of course).

"It was the figure of a lady—grey and ethereal, and ghostly—and with vague and absent eyes—and she was making her way up a turret-stair, with her hand outstretched

before her. The curious thing was that her hand and part of her arm caught the moonlight—and yet they were quite visionary too—while the rest of her was in a kind of shadow. Peggy, if you were to see anyone coming along *there*—now——"

They were regarding, like two frightened children, a narrow and dusky corridor, into which, at some distance away, fell a solitary ray of moonlight.

"No," said Peggy; "the place is too silent and dead and empty for even a ghost. But I don't think I should like to wander through these ruins by myself at night."

And yet, after all our imaginary reconstruction was over, she seemed loth to leave. She was the last to linger there, in the open plateau, looking up at the grey moonlit walls and the empty windows, the ivied towers, and the serene and silent stars. Nay, when we were all coming away by the garden-path, she left us, and went back, and stood there alone for a minute or two. When she returned she said—

"I wonder, now, when I am at home again in America, and when I think of this night, I wonder whether I shall be able to persuade myself that I ever did actually see anything

so wonderful and beautiful? I am afraid it will seem all like a dream. I went back to have another look just now; I suppose I shall be able to remember something like it—something a little like it—but it will be all dream-like and unreal. It will appear to be a castle built of air—as unsubstantial as the Grey Lady you were speaking of."

This possibility seemed to concern her not a little—or perhaps she was merely trying to impress on her memory the chief features of the scene she had just witnessed; at all events, she was very silent during the long drive back to Warwick, and paid hardly any heed to what little conversation was going on.

Now, this was to be the last night that our little party, as hitherto constituted, was to assemble together; and at the modest banquet that was meant to console us for our lack of dinner, the two women-folk—no doubt looking back over the lengthened companionship now drawing to a close, and bethinking them of Jack Duncombe's helpfulness and friendliness and general good-humour—were unmistakably inclined to be complaisant to the young man. Whether his hostess had really forgiven him for his scandalous schemes in connection with the Young Chevalier, or

whether she was confidently looking forward to an ally who would keep Miss Peggy's sympathies on the right side, one, of course, could not say; but, in any case, she was very kind to him, and not only renewed her expressions of regret at his going, but once more urged his return when that might be practicable for him.

"Oh, I shall be glad enough to get back if I can," said he—which he hardly would have said had he been going away in resentment of Miss Peggy's conduct; and now he was affecting to be more cheerful, though he was not in a very gay mood, we could see. "And, as I say, I think you are all right now for the rest of the expedition. Of course there was always a risk—the experiment never having been tried before; and once or twice I thought we should be stuck; but I think everything should go smoothly now. If you had to begin all over again, of course, you would have the boat six inches narrower in beam, and six inches lower in the roof, so that you would have no trouble with the bridges: that's all that I can see in the way of improvement. I consider the whole thing to have been most successful so far——"

"And you know yourself how much of that

we owe to you," Mrs. Threepenny-bit made bold to say. "Think of the Thames, even—we should never have got on at all."

"Oh! I had to learn like other people," said he, modestly. "I never had anything to do with a boat like this before. But I think it was a capital idea, to begin with; and I think it has turned out very well. The thing that strikes me most about it is the curious sense of independence you have—you are not tied to any inn or town—you stop just where you like—and you take your own house with you all the time."

"Some people would find it rather slow," she suggested.

"Some people would find it quite intolerable," said he. "But you remember what Mr. Ruskin says:—'To any person who has all his senses about him—travelling becomes dull in exact proportion to its rapidity. Going by railroad I do not consider travelling at all; it is merely being sent to a place, and very little different from becoming a parcel.' And then you have to consider that if this trip has so far been pleasant enough in spite of the broken weather, you can imagine what it would be in settled fine weather."

"Oh! I don't think the weather matters

much," observed Miss Peggy, blithely. "You can always pop indoors to escape a shower: it isn't like driving in rain. No; what strikes me as the most curious thing is the way the time passes—the extraordinary number of things you get to do. You gentlemen seem to be hard at work from morning till night; while for us—well, I suppose, I shall get my novel carried on a bit further some day or other, but I don't know when. And I can't get letters written at all. I know some people who will think I have got lost in the woods—wandered in the trackless prairies of the middle of England—and never coming back to civilised life any more. That's another thing: When are the adventures to begin?"

"What adventures?"

"Why, we must have wild adventures; we must be attacked by robbers; and have to barricade the doors and fire through the windows. Why shouldn't there be pirates on a canal, and desperate villains, and bloody deeds? Oh! I can tell you I saw something yesterday morning that would have startled you. It was before any of you were up—or out, at least. There was a solitary barge coming along; and as it was passing, I saw

there was a tuft of hair hanging from the top of the rudder. Well, anything more horribly like a scalp it was impossible to imagine—it was long hair, too, like a woman's. And there was I all alone, mind you: I might have been another victim; the cowardly dogs of Mingoes might have sprung upon me, and bound me hand and foot—think of that for an adventure: the Scalp-Hunters of the Wild Canal!——"

"But what was the tuft of hair, Peggy?" her hostess interrupts.

"Oh! well," Miss Peggy says lightly; "Captain Columbus told me afterwards. It was an emblem of affection, not of blood-thirstiness. It was a memorial of an old friend and companion gone to his rest. It was part of the tail of a horse. But that's neither here nor there," she adds; "what I say is, we must have some wild and perilous adventures——"

"I hope it won't be as you are going down the Severn," remarks the young man, significantly.

"There again, now," cries Mrs. Threepenny-bit. "I do really believe you think we shall be in danger going down the Severn. What will the boat do, Mr. Duncombe? Is it possible for her to roll over, if there are

heavy waves? Or could she be blown over? For I won't have Peggy run any risk. She's under my care. She's not worth much; but I have charge of her."

"No, I don't think there will be any great danger," he says again, to reassure them. "In any case, you can all go on board the tug; and if the house-boat sinks, there will be nobody drowned but the one who is steering—and that will be Murdoch."

"I will not have Murdoch drowned for all the house-boats that ever were built!" exclaims Mrs. Threepenny-bit. "Can't the wretched old thing steer herself?"

"No, that kind of craft hasn't been invented yet. But I think she will keep afloat. Of course you won't all be sitting on the roof—by-the-way, you have never tried that way of sailing through the country."

"The weather never gave us a chance!" she says. "But there is a wonderful change coming. There are golden days in store for us, Peggy; and you and I will have cushions and rugs laid along the top, and we will sit and sew, or read, or you will play the banjo, and we shall be as gods together——"

"Until lunch-time arrives," one remarks.

"We shall have lunch on the top too."

"Well, don't try it as you are going down the Severn, especially if there is a brisk breeze coming up against the stream," Mr. Jack Duncombe observes, by way of final warning. "For there is next to nothing to hold on by—that rail has got all smashed with getting through the bridges. Then the channel of the river twists; and if at a corner the wind were to catch her and tilt her over a bit, your sliding off into the water would not only be unpleasant—it would be very ignominious."

"Can't we have a small dinghy astern, if that caravanserai is likely to go to the bottom?" she demands.

"Yes," he answers, "that would be simple enough; and then if Murdoch found the boat filling—I don't see why she should myself, but such things have happened—if he found her threatening to sink, he would jump into the dinghy, cut the painter, and be all right."

"At all events, Mr. Duncombe," she says to him (and she can be very gracious when she pleases—that is, when everything is going as she wants it to go); "at all events, we shall hope to find you with us there, to have the benefit of your advice. I am sure we can't say how indebted we are to you for your help in getting us along as far as we have got."

Soon thereafter—for it had been a long and a busy day—there was a general departure for our respective quarters; and the Warwick Arms subsided into the general silence that lay over the sleeping town. And if Miss Peggy dreamed dreams and saw visions that night—and if any fragments of melody, suggested by what she had seen at Kenilworth, were haunting her brain, it is as likely as not that these were the familiar lines:—

> "The dews of summer night did fall,
> The moon, sweet regent of the sky,
> Silvered the walls of Cumnor Hall,
> And many an oak that grew thereby."

But perhaps it was just as well that she had not encountered the ghost of poor Amy Robsart.

CHAPTER III.

"Fill the bowl with rosy wine!
Around our temples roses twine!
And let us cheerfully a while,
Like the wine and roses, smile.
Crowned with roses, we contemn
Gyges' wealthy diadem.
To-day is ours, what do we fear?
To-day is ours; we have it here;
Let's treat it kindly, that it may
Wish, at least, with us to stay.
Let's banish business, banish sorrow:
To the gods belongs to-morrow."

Here, in the coffee-room of the Shakespeare Hotel, Stratford-on-Avon, on this May morning, one is reluctantly compelled to chide the nervous impatience of a certain young person, apparently caused by nothing more than Queen Tita's delay in coming down.

"What would you be at? Do you want to take Stratford at a rush?—do you think you are Ewen Cameron at Tel-el-Kebir? Do you want to join the ranks of the impenitent

tourist? Why don't you go over to the sofa there, and sit down, and drum your toes on the carpet, and strum your fingers on the window-pane, and try to get rid of a little of that superfluous trans-Atlantic electricity? A pretty frame of mind for one who ought rather to be thinking about the secret of the Warwickshire Avon, and wondering whether you will ever discover it."

"Don't be hard on a fellow," she says good-naturedly, and she goes and sits down on the sofa, and clasps her hands in front of her. "Well, now, what is the secret of the Warwickshire Avon?"

"It is something that can't be explained to you—though you may find it out for yourself in time. Of course there are conditions. You would have to calm down your temperament a little. It isn't everyone who can hear the grass growing—just at once; you have to wait and listen, and wait and listen; and if there is any place for hearing the grass grow, it is in the Warwickshire meadows and along the Warwickshire streams. Then you've got to leave comparisons behind; and you've got to forget chromo-lithographs; and you have to prepare yourself for a little disappointment, even perhaps for a little dejection

and vague melancholy; then, by-and-by, you grow reconciled; and then, slowly and gradually, you begin to feel the charm there is in the old-world repose and gentleness and quiet of the landscape, and in the placid nature of the people, and in the silence of the monotonous but perfectly cheerful and even days. If you were to live in a Warwickshire village for six months, Miss Peggy, you would get to see what worlds of space and time lie between the innocent gaiety of Izaak Walton and the unceasing self-consciousness of Thoreau. But where would you be at the end of the six months?"

"In the village, I suppose."

"In your grave, more likely. But you would have learnt something. The fact is, if Rasselas had been born in this Happy Valley, it isn't that he never would have left it—he never would have understood how anyone could want to leave it. In a minute or two, when we go out, I will show you long, straggling, old-fashioned thoroughfares in which nearly every second house is a small tavern—a tavern that does no trade. Generally the door is shut. If you went inside, you would find no one in the bar; but by-and-by a smiling and buxom little landlady might

make her appearance, and if you asked for a glass of ale, she would cheerfully accede, and expect you to enter into a conversation with her about things in general. In the evening, of course, you might find a few friends of the house occupying the parlour, with long clay pipes, and pewter pots, and some slow and measured talk about the crops, the markets, and so forth—safe remarks, warranted to stir up no argument. But in the day-time these little inns never think of doing any business—— "

"How do the people live, then?"

"They live as their neighbours live—by not taking any trouble about it. They live as the grass grows. Why should they take any trouble? Why should they think of leaving the Happy Valley? They live as their fathers lived, and as their grandfathers and grandmothers lived, and they grow old contentedly in the same way. As long as there is a good fat side of bacon hanging from the kitchen rafter, why should they trouble about to-morrow, or next day, or next week? It is to-day they live in; and they are sufficiently happy in the present moment."

"But the bacon has to be paid for," says this practical young person.

"The bacon may have come from a farmer, most likely, who got a barrel of ale in exchange."

"Then the ale has to be paid for."

The insatiable character of the American mind!

"I tell you that they don't trouble about such things. Come and see them. Talk to them. Judge for yourself if you ever met happier people—though they don't seem to do any trade."

"Oh, well, I don't care anything about them," she says impertinently. "There is only one tavern in Stratford that I care about—that is the one that Shakespeare used to frequent—where he played shovel-board with his friend the landlord—Julius Shawe, wasn't it? And I've seen it—at least the outside of it—I noticed the sign as we drove up to the hotel; I recognised it at once."

There is a pause of a second or two.

"What are you staring at?" she says.

"I am admiring your calmness. You can sit there and say things of that kind—and have no fear of the heavens falling on you!"

"What do you mean? It isn't possible that you never noticed the Falcon Tavern?—you've been in Stratford before."

"The Falcon Tavern! Why, every amateur magazinist who sets about reconstructing Shakespeare's Stratford is sure to start away with the Falcon Tavern in the High-street, opposite New Place; whereas New Place isn't in the High-street and never was; and the house opposite wasn't a tavern at all in Shakespeare's time, nor for many a long year thereafter. But that's nothing. That is a common and vulgar error. You have gone far further and deeper and wilder than that——"

"It's all very well to talk," she says, in an injured tone, and she takes up a little green volume; "but just you look at this woodcut. It is a drawing of New Place, and here is the Falcon Inn opposite, sign and all——"

"Oh, pitch that wretched book out of the window! Do you want to be told that Judith Shakespeare married one Thomas Quincey, and also that she became Mrs. Hall and left one daughter who was afterwards Lady Barnard? Is that the kind of information you are pouring into your innocent young mind? As for that drawing, it is only part and parcel of Samuel Ireland's ridiculous inventions; but where did you get the rest of that nonsense—about the shovel-board and Julius

Shawe the landlord and all that? Not in that book, bad as it is."

"So there was no Falcon Tavern in Shakespeare's time?" she says absently, and in rather a disappointed way.

"But there was a house there, opposite New Place," one says to her (for it is a pity to rob her of all her illusions), "and a very interesting old house it is now; and if you are good, we'll take you to see it presently. And you may imagine, if you like, that some of the furniture may have come across from New Place, as alterations were made there from time to time; possibly the oak panelling, too, which is very good oak panelling indeed, though some monstrous wretch has gone and painted it all over at some time or other. Do you know that a countrywoman of yours offered to pay all the cost of having that panelling carefully scraped and restored to its original condition; and it is a great pity that the offer wasn't accepted."

Here Miss Peggy holds out both her hands, straight before her.

"Look!"

"Well?"

"Am I sufficiently calm now? Do you see how steady my fingers are?"

"They don't tremble much."

"And yet this is my first visit to Stratford-on-Avon—my first visit—and I am an American girl: oh, you don't understand!"

Perhaps one did understand, easily enough. However, at this moment Mrs. Threepenny-bit made her appearance, all bonneted and shawled and ready to set forth; Miss Peggy, with much alacrity, picked up her sunshade; and presently we had passed through the shadowed corridor and out from under the pillared portico into the white air of Stratford town.

And as we leisurely walked along this main thoroughfare, our young American friend spoke not one word to either of her companions; but from the curiously-excited interest with which she regarded every object she could fix her eyes on, you might have sworn she had it in her imagination that this dawdling butcher's boy and that patient, plodding old woman, with the silvery hair and the Normandy-pippin cheeks, were somehow related to Shakespeare—the lineal descendants of his neighbours and associates; and that he himself had walked along this identical grey pavement. On this occasion we allowed her but a glimpse of New Place and a glance at the

outside of the Falcon Inn; we wanted to give her some notion of the country around Stratford; so we took her along Scholar's Lane, making for the meadows that lie between the town and the hamlet of Shottery.

The day was just fitted for the placid Warwickshire landscape into which we wandered outside the suburban gardens. There had been some rain during the night, or perhaps early in the morning; but now the skies were fair, if not completely clear; long streaks of turquoise blue lay between the motionless, soft, fleecy, white clouds; and a dull, sultry sunlight lay over the moist green meadows, and the hawthorn hedges, and the great wide-branching elms, not a leaf of which was stirring. A deathlike silence brooded over this wide extent of country, that rose at the horizon into a line of low-lying hill serrated with woods; but somewhere, far away, there was a tinkling of a bell—probably a school-bell; and around us there was a continuous twittering of birds busy after the rain. There was no other sign of life. And in this perfect stillness and solitariness one grew to fancy that, however Stratford town may have been altered in its old-world streets and houses, these meadows must have been in Shake-

speare's time, and long before that, too, very much what they are now, with buttercups among the lush grass, in the sweet May-time, under the fleecy white skies. Miss Peggy was most anxious to be satisfied on that point. This was the very way, then, that Shakespeare would come if he were going over to Shottery? He must have crossed this little brook? and seen those hills away down there in the south? It must have been as lonely then as it is now? and a place of meditation as one walked?

Presently she had strayed from the pathway a short distance, and was engaged in gathering buttercups and daisies. When she returned, with a considerable handful, she said—

"They say we Americans go through Europe chipping and cutting everywhere to take back souvenirs. But I don't think we do that now: we have got shamed out of it. Anyway, no one would grudge me these?"

"It is a very simple bouquet, Peggy," Mrs. Threepenny-bit says; "I think we could find you something better than that."

"Better than that?" she answers at once. "I don't know where, then. If you only knew the value that will be put upon them when I send them home. They will have to do for a

good many people, too; but all I shall have to say will be—'Dear So-and-so, I send you two or three wild-flowers that I gathered this morning in Shakespeare's fields.' Do you think it will matter to them what kind of flowers they are? Ah, if you only knew! I suppose, now, you would think it awfully silly if a girl were to cry when she got these daisies sent to her in America—I mean, a girl who isn't likely ever to be in England herself—and who knows all about Stratford—but has never seen any actual thing belonging to it. You would think it silly, wouldn't you? For you English are so dreadfully stolid. You don't seem to care about anything. Your great men are all thrown away on you; you don't take the trouble to honour them; you are quite indifferent. I do believe you think more of the man who invented Harvey's sauce than of any poet who ever lived in your country. Why, I have hardly met any anybody in England who has been to Stoke Poges; and I never heard of an American who came to see England who didn't go there. You, now," she says, addressing a perfectly inoffensive bystander, "have you ever been to Stoke Poges?"

"No."

"There now!" she says triumphantly.

"But you may admire a man's work, and honour his memory, without making pilgrimages to his grave."

"It is because you won't take the trouble. Or, perhaps, it isn't consistent with English pride to show anything like gratitude? I suppose, instead of showing gratitude, you would rather sit down and pull all that he had done to bits, and declare that the mass of mankind were quite mistaken in thinking there was anything fine in it at all?"

"Ah, well, Peggy," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, getting hold of the girl's arm and taking her on with her, "isn't it a comfort that sometimes we have a stranger come among us to give us a good scolding?"

"Yes; but she might be a little more accurate," says one of us (who likes to be crushed no more than any other human being). "If it comes to that, Harvey's sauce wasn't invented by a man, but by a woman: sauce of any kind comes more natural to a woman. And as for those bits of weeds that you are sending to America as having been gathered in Shakespeare's fields—how do you know that these were the meadows that belonged to Shakespeare?"

She turns her head for a second.

"They belong to him now—and so does the whole place: I don't care what English landlord thinks he owns them," she says proudly; and of course that settles the question; there is no more to be said; it is quite right that an impertinent American school-girl should come over here to teach us the whole duty of man.

But you should have observed how she changed her tune as we drew near to Shottery. She had vaguely heard of doubts having been thrown on the tradition connecting Anne Hathaway's name with the well-known cottage; and she was anxious to be assured that all the thousands and thousands of people, many of them famous, others hardly so famous, who had made their pilgrimage to the spot had not been labouring under a delusion. It was quite certain, was it, that the name given in "William Shagspere's" marriage-bond was "Anne Hathwey"? And it was known that there were Hathaways living in Shottery? And the belief that Anne Hathaway lived in this particular cottage went very far back, did it not? And so forth. Then she says—

"And is it possible that Shakespeare's widow married again after his death?"

"So you have heard about that, have you?

Well, it was a countryman of yours, and a friend of mine, who threw that pretty little bomb-shell into the air, and then ran away to Australia before it burst. Is it possible? Everything is possible. But considering that she was an old woman of sixty when Shakespeare died, and that she herself died seven years afterwards, and that on her tombstone she is described as 'Anne, wife of Mr. William Shakespeare,' I don't think it very probable. Well, now, haven't you got any more questions? Don't you want to know whether it is reasonably likely that Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays?"

"Well, now, is there anything in that theory?" she asks, with much innocence.

"Oh, I'm not going to give any opinion. I'm not going to prejudice your mind, if you have any notion of becoming a convert to the new religion. But I fancy that if the ghost of Ben Jonson could hear it suggested that his old chum and boon companion was nothing but a rank impostor—if Ben Jonson could hear of that suggestion—and also be permitted the use of pen, ink, and paper between now and dinner-time—I imagine there would come a message from the other world that would considerably startle some folk."

And there was no more impertinence, there was rather a humble submission, and a tremulous eagerness of interest, shown by Miss Peggy, as we went down and through the scattered little hamlet that was almost smothered amid the luxuriant leafage of the Spring. Very picturesque indeed were the small cottages on this fresh May morning; the orchards were gay with apple-blossom, and the gardens with lilacs both purple and white; while the warm air around us was fragrant with sweet-brier, and also at times with the soft-smelling hawthorn. This was our first meeting with the hawthorn; not a bit of may had we seen all the way along; no doubt the shelter of the little hollow and the moist warm winds combined had brought the blossom out somewhat before its usual time.

The old dame at the cottage made a great pet of Miss Peggy; and when she discovered that the tall young stranger hailed from across the Atlantic she pointed out in the visitors' book the signatures of one or two distinguished Americans whom she thought the young lady might know. And when we were coming away, she declared that the little posy Miss Peggy was carrying would never do at all. Oh, no; she must take away with her—if she

was going back to America—something a little better than that: wouldn't she wait for a moment until she could have a few flowers gathered for her from the garden? And very soon the good old dame had culled a very pretty little nosegay of common cottage-flowers—columbine, forget-me-not, wall-flower, and the like; and she gave them to Miss Peggy with a favouring smile. Only cottage-flowers they were; but we who were standing by had a kind of notion that the young American lady would not have exchanged that little bouquet for all the hothouse flowers in Covent-garden multiplied a dozen times over.

Then we wandered on through the straggling small hamlet half hidden amongst its gardens and orchards, and eventually made our way out on to the Alcester-road, and so back to Stratford town. We were just entering the High-street when whom should we espy in the distance but our faithful Captain Columbus, serenely sauntering along the pavement and looking at the shop-windows. And naturally we congratulated ourselves on having a skipper so prompt and alert, and were glad to think that now, at any moment we chose, we could resume our voyage, having the Nameless Barge

close by, awaiting us in some convenient creek.

"Good morning, Captain! You haven't been long in getting her through. Whereabouts in Stratford is the canal-basin?"

"Beg pardon, Sir, but she isn't in Stratford yet," says he, rather solemnly; and in an instant the dreadful fear flashes upon us that our noble vessel had been run into in mid-Atlantic—in mid-canal, that is—and irrecoverably sunk.

"Where is she, then?"

"Well, Sir, as near as I could judge, about three miles from Claverdon: that was the first station on the line I came to, across country. Very sorry, Sir, but she's stuck fast there: there's a bridge I can't get her through anyhow."

"There!—the moment Mr. Duncombe leaves us we get into trouble!" exclaims Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with an audacity which even she has rarely equalled; for who was so willing that Jack Duncombe should go, in order that she might provide a place for her lamp-post of a Highlander?

"There's only the one way, Sir," continues our indomitable Columbus. "The canal people say they will draw off the water so as we can

get the boat through; but they want to be paid for that."

Aha!—so there was a solution, after all? And how could we do better than take a lesson from the great and wise of our own land? Now-a-days, when an English Minister is confronted by a difficulty—foreign or domestic—his first and immediate thought is, "Very well, then; what size of a cheque is necessary to settle this job?" That is modern English statesmanship; and sometimes he pays away money so freely that the people who get it are at their wits' end to know what to do with it. And why should we not, in our small and humble way, profit by such an example? We were in a difficulty; we were asked to pay; and what was the use of arguing or fighting?

"How much will they take, Captain?"

"A matter of a few shillings, Sir, I should think, would get it done."

"Go you away back to Claverdon, then, and pay what they ask, and bring that boat along as fast as ever you can. For the rain has taken it into its head to stop; and we want to get some part of the voyage done in decent weather."

"Very well, Sir," said our Captain, and we left him to make his way onward to the station.

The moment we entered our little sitting-room at the hotel, Queen Tita cast a hasty glance towards the mantelpiece; there was nothing for her there.

"Isn't it strange Colonel Cameron hasn't telegraphed?" she said. "He must have had both my telegram and letter by now."

"Oh, well, I am not sorry," Miss Peggy made answer, ingenuously. "Wouldn't it be delicious to be away entirely by ourselves—in the woods—in the Forest of Arden?—and we start to-morrow, don't we, if Captain Columbus can bring the boat along? In any case, couldn't we go to Claverdon, and walk across? I do hope you won't wait for anybody. I think it would be splendid to be entirely by ourselves."

"Why, Peggy," says her hostess, as she draws a chair in to the table, where luncheon is already laid, "didn't you feel how lop-sided we were this morning? We want a fourth to complete the party. And what would you do if you hadn't somebody to practice on——?"

"Now, now, now," Miss Peggy interposes. "You have lost the right to say anything of the kind about me. If you were honest, you would confess that I have behaved most beautifully all the way along. Now confess. Con-

fess that I've cheated you. I know what you expected—oh, yes; I know quite well. And perhaps I have even disappointed you, in giving you no chance of scolding; but, any way, confess you have been quite mistaken."

"Oh, but I am not so sure about that," Mrs. Threepenny-bit says coolly, as she puts aside her gloves and sits down. "I am not at all so sure about that. Young women are remarkably clever in concealing what is going on. And we have had no explanation yet of Mr. Duncombe's going away. It is very strange that he should have nothing to put forward in the way of excuse—very strange indeed."

"And do you think I had anything to do with it?" the girl demands—with inscrutable eyes.

"I don't know. The whole affair is very mysterious. Before I could give you a certificate for good conduct, I should want to understand why he went away so suddenly."

"If I had anything to do with it, why should he want to come back?" says Miss Peggy, with her eyes still downcast.

"I don't know that either; but I have often seen young people make those sudden resolutions—when they were annoyed with

each other — or perhaps hoping for some change of manner—trusting to the effect of absence—and regret perhaps——"

"I hope Mr. Duncombe and I parted very good friends," the young lady observes, with suspicious calmness: is she making a fool of a woman twice her age—and her hostess as well?

"I will admit this," the other continues, "that perhaps you had not sufficient time to settle him thoroughly. You were very much engaged — with English history and other things. Of course you did not know he was going. No doubt you thought you could take him up and settle him effectually when you had a little more leisure."

"I wish I had a big brother," says Miss Peggy, pensively; "he wouldn't allow people to say such things of me."

"Oh, yes, a pretty innocent you are!" the other retorts. "Now sit down at once and have some luncheon; for you have a long and busy afternoon before you."

A long and busy afternoon indeed it was; for we had to take her first of all to the house in Henley-street, in which Shakespeare was born, and introduce her to the Misses Chattaway; then we showed her over New Place;

also she was allowed to inspect the rooms of the Falcon Inn; from thence we guided her steps to Stratford Church, and she passed along the noble avenue of limes, and entered the hushed building, and sought out Shakespeare's grave; finally, ere the dusk should draw over the afternoon, we led her down by the mill, and across the bridge that spans the smooth-flowing Avon, and through the wide and flower-starred meadows that lie between the town and the hanging woods of the Weir Brake.

Now, just above those steep banks there is a corner from which a very pleasant view of Stratford and its neighbourhood may be obtained; and when these two women had climbed up through the bushes to this open space they seemed in no great hurry to leave it. A more peaceful pastoral scene one could hardly wish for. Moreover, there was now a touch of faint salmon-colour among the heavy purple clouds above our heads, and there were masses of vivid and burning gold in the western skies; so that a warmer and mellower light fell over the green foliage enfolding the town. Stratford ceased to be a show place. You could not see the Memorial Theatre. Down below us were the yellow waters of the

Avon, flowing by pollard willows and grassy banks; then came the bridge and the mill; then the umbrageous elms, from which rose the distant spire of the church. There was nothing striking about this stretch of landscape; but it was peaceful; the quietude around us was gracious; the golden evening grew on apace, with hardly a sound audible anywhere. Whether Miss Peggy was trying to get at the secret of Warwickshire scenery, one could not say; but she and her friend remained there for long and long; and scarce a word was spoken between them. Nay, they lingered among the bushes on their way down (there were golden shafts of fire shooting through between the black branches) under pretence of seeking for wild hyacinths; and when, later on, in the grey twilight, they passed through the darkening meadows—like two ghosts they were as they went—they had with them some cuckoo-flowers, and speedwells, and the like. These things were for friends far away.

And again when we got back to the hotel there was neither telegram nor message of any kind awaiting us; and again Miss Peggy expressed the hope that when we once more left the haunts of men and disappeared into

the Forest of Arden—or rather into the neighbourhood that used to bear the name—we should be all by ourselves. But a little later on, as we sate at dinner, a brown envelope was brought in, which Queen Tita quickly seized and broke open.

"Yes, yes," she said directly, and with much evident satisfaction, "he is coming—he expects to be with us to-morrow morning: now, Peggy, we have got a companion for you who will interest you."

Miss Peggy did not seem to look at the matter in that light.

"Farewell our sylvan joys and sports!" she said, with plaintive sadness. "I had looked forward to all kinds of revels when we got into the forest—dances of fauns and satyrs by moonlight—everything that you would naturally expect in such a haunted place. I thought we might try a scene or two from 'As You Like It' some night—some misty night perhaps, when you could imagine things. But if there is to be a spectator—then it's all over."

"Why, you are like Mr. Duncombe," her hostess says. "You want to produce a play without having any critics looking on. I think you would find Colonel Cameron a very

indulgent critic. What has set you against his coming, Peggy?"

"Oh! I don't know—I'm afraid of him."

"Why should you be afraid of him?"

"I can hardly tell you—except that there is something very shivery about that passage in 'Childe Harold'—you remember?"

"I should think I do remember—

'And wild and high the Cameron's Gathering rose,
The war-note of Lochiel, which Albyn's hills
Have heard, and heard, too, have her Saxon foes:
How in the noon of night that pibroch thrills
Savage and shrill! But with the breath which fills
Their mountain-pipe, so fill the mountaineers
With the fierce native daring which instils
The stirring memory of a thousand years;
And Evan's, Donald's fame rings in each clansman's ears!'

And you know what Walter Scott wrote, Peggy?" she continues, rather proudly—

'Where through battle, rout, and reel,
Through storms of shot and hedge of steel,
Led he, the grandson of Lochiel,
The valiant Fassiefern.
Through steel and shot he leads no more,
But, Sunard rough, and wild Ardgour,
And Morven long shall tell,
And proud Ben Nevis hear with awe,
How at the bloody Quatre Bras
Brave Cameron heard the wild hurrah
Of victory as he fell!'"

"Well, that's just it," the girl said; "I'm afraid."

"Afraid of Ewen Cameron!" was all that Mrs. Threepenny-bit answered; but there was a smile on her lips which seemed to say that she did not consider Sir Ewen Cameron to be in private life a very truculent person.

Now, whether it was that Miss Peggy was determined to have one merry evening before the coming of this overawing Colonel, or whether it was that Nature demanded a little relaxation after the high-strung excitement of the day, true it is and of verity that on this occasion—after the dinner-things had been removed—she broke out into a pure madness of audacious mirth and mischief. She had only an audience of one; the third member of the party was supposed to be absorbed in nicotine and the reading of local journals (which are often quite as interesting as those which deal with large imperial matters). But he could hear something of what was going on. Miss Peggy had got the whole of the sofa to herself. She was seated at the extreme end of it. She had the banjo on her knee. She was addressing an imaginary person at the other end of the sofa; and her imitation of the speech of a negro-minstrel

was so admirable that one suspected this was not the first time she had practised it.

"Well, now, Mr. Bones," she was saying, in tones of lofty patronage, "I will ask you a question. Can you tell me when a door is not a door?"

Likewise, she answers for the imaginary minstrel—

"Can I tell you when a door is not a door?"

"Yes, Sir; can you tell me when a door is not a door? You are a clever man, Mr. Bones: you can answer my question, I presume."

"When is a door not a door?"

"Yes, Sir; that is the question I ask you. But if you do not know, then I will tell you. A door is not a door, Mr. Bones, when it is a negress."

She rises, advances a step, and gravely announces to her imaginary audience the name of the next song—"Driven from Home"; then, with a courteous bow, she returns to her seat and takes up her banjo. She does not sing very loudly (for fear of disturbing the newspaper-reader), but one can hear the simple and touching pathos she puts into the words:—

"Out in the cold world, out in the street,
Asking a penny of each one I meet;
Shoeless I wander about through the day,
Wearing my young life in sorrow away.
No one to help me, no one to bless,
No one to pity me, none to caress;
Fatherless, motherless, sadly I roam,
A child of misfortune, I'm driven from home."

Then she glances along the sofa, as if inviting a chorus, which she herself leads, but now singing alto—

"No one to help me, no one to bless,
No one to pity me, none to caress;
Fatherless, motherless, sadly I roam,
Nursed by my poverty, driven from home."

She puts the banjo on her knee, and resumes her cheerful conversation with Mr. Bones; and really, if one forbore to peep round the corner of this newspaper, so perfect is the imitation that one might easily imagine her to be in evening dress, with a large diamond in her shirt-front, her face blackened, her lips red, her eyes rolling in doll-like fashion as she speaks, or pitifully upraised to heaven as she sings. But presently one hears the announcement, "Ladies and gentlemen, there will now be an interval of ten minutes"; and therewith, taking up her banjo, she steals out of the room.

"Have you been listening?" says Queen Tita.

"Now and again."

"Do you know that is an extraordinarily clever creature! Who would have suspected that she could do a thing like that, and do it so well? I wonder how much more cleverness she has concealed about her; and how much more madness is necessary to bring it out. For it's only when she goes daft that she reveals herself. And what is she up to now?"

No guessing was needful; there was a footstep without in the passage; one swiftly and discreetly returned to the small-beer chronicles of Warwickshire; and the door opened.

Yes, the door opened. And what was this apparition—this phantom from the Forest of Arden—this tall, swash-buckler youth, with doublet, hose, and beef-eater cap, and with a voluminous cloak of russet homespun thrown lightly around him? For an instant Rosalind stands there, with heightened colour, and laughing lips, and hesitating mien: then she enters and shuts the door, and makes her way across the room to her friend, whose head she affectionately encircles with her arm.

"'From henceforth,'" she says (but almost

in a whisper, so as not to attract attention), "'I will be merry, coz, and devise sports. Let me see: what think you of falling in love?'"

"You can't do it, Peggy; it isn't in your nature."

[N.B.—This speech is not to be found in any well-known edition of "As You Like It"; and its authenticity is open to grave doubt.]

"'Love is merely a madness, and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do; and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too.'"

"Peggy, you will be taught a lesson some day, take my word for it!"

[This, also, is clearly a corruption of the text.]

But here Rosalind suddenly alters her manner, and takes her friend's head in both her hands for a moment, and strokes her a little.

"'But, come, now I will be your Rosalind in a more coming-on disposition, and, ask me what you will, I will grant it.'"

"You can sing me a song, Peggy, and leave my hair alone."

Then one hears a fairly expressive voice sing very quietly—

"Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me,
And tune his merry note
Unto the sweet bird's throat,
Come hither, come hither, come hither:
Here shall we see
No enemy ——"

But that snatch of song was never finished. There was a tapping at the door. With a smothered shriek, Miss Peggy flew to the window, and hid herself behind the curtains, pretending to be looking down into the street: hardly anything could be seen of the russet-draped Ganymede behind those white folds.

"Shall I bring you some tea, Ma'am?"

"No, thank you, Minnie."

"Or for the young lady, Ma'am?"

The young lady hiding behind the curtain dares not to turn her head.

"No; I don't think you need trouble," answers Mrs. Threepenny-bit on her behalf.

"Thank you, Ma'am," says the neat handmaiden, and withdraws; and then, when she is gone, one is vaguely aware that Rosalind—probably considering that another such interruption might not be so dexterously encountered—slips across the room, opens the door, and disappears into the dark passage.

"Did you see her?" says Mrs. Threepenny-bit.

"I caught a glimpse of her."

"Didn't she make a bonny boy!"

"There have been plainer youths."

"That was a costume she got for a fancy-dress ball in Brooklyn; I've never seen it before, but I've heard of it. She says she got it for its cheapness; but I'm sure it must be more like what Rosalind would wear in the forest than the dress that most stage-Rosalinds wear—Peggy's is really a disguise, whereas the stage-costume would be merely an invitation to robbers. Yes, indeed, she makes a bonny boy; I don't wonder that Phœbe fell in love with her. And I'm pretty sure Peggy was thinking of some prank when she took the trouble to bring that dress with her—some nonsense in the Forest of Arden; and now that she has got a ridiculous fear of Colonel Cameron into her head, I suppose she was determined to have her piece of play-acting before he came. Well, she will have to behave henceforth: if I were to threaten to tell him of her masquerading in a room in a Stratford hotel, wouldn't that frighten her out of her wits?"

But Miss Peggy was not prepared to

"behave" just yet. Although she came back in her own proper clothing, she was far from being in her right mind. By rude force she possessed herself of the newspapers, and deliberately put them away; she opened the piano, and dragged Mrs. Threepenny-bit thither, and opened some music; she demanded that the table in the centre of the room should be shoved into the window-recess —in case of certain exigencies connected with one or two of the songs; and then she proceeded to get her banjo strings in tune with the keys. What followed needs not be described here—being far too chaotic to bear consecutive narrative. Indeed it has been observed by many travellers, and reported by them in all good faith, that there is something peculiarly exhilarating—to use the mildest term—in the atmosphere of Stratford-upon-Avon; and stories are told (to which it is difficult to give credence) of the more than extraordinary conduct of which the most grave and serious-minded people, visiting that town, have been guilty. That we did not altogether escape the contagion, on this particular evening, may be frankly and freely admitted. Within just and sober bounds, there was a little modest hilarity. And, indeed, to observe

Miss Peggy gently gliding round the room to a waltz-measure, singing the while the chorus of the song, and also helping out the accompaniment with her banjo—— But these are revelations which, if once begun, it might be difficult to end :—

> *"Souls of Poets dead and gone,*
> *What Elysium have ye known,*
> *Happy field or mossy cavern,*
> *Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern?"*

CHAPTER IV.

"The Laird o' Roslin's daughter
Walked through the wood her lane,
When by came Captain Wedderburn,
A servant to the King."

Next morning there was a welcome bustle of preparation, for the boat had been successfully brought along to Stratford and had now to be provisioned for the resumption of our voyage; likewise we had to write our last letters before bidding good-bye to civilisation and once more disappearing into the unknown. In the midst of all this, the door of our small sitting-room is opened, and Miss Peggy appears—just a little breathless.

"Say, now, what is your friend like?" she asks, with some eagerness.

"What friend?" says Queen Tita, looking up from her correspondence.

"Why, Colonel Cameron, of course. Is he very tall, and thin, and sandy-haired;

with a small moustache, that has a streak of grey in it; and blue-grey eyes that look at you—well, as if they had seen you before?"

"Yes, that is rather like him—but what do you mean, Peggy?—he isn't come already, is he?"

"Well, it can't be he either," she continues. "He wouldn't think of going boating in a costume like that—a frock coat, and a tall hat, yellow gloves, patent leather boots—well, if it is your friend, he looks as if he had just stepped out of Pall-mall."

"But where did you see him?"

"Whoever he is, he is down below, in the hall."

"In this hotel?"

"Yes—and—and he looked at me as I passed him—as if he thought I might belong to your party—at least that was my fancy—I only saw him for a moment——"

"Of course it is Colonel Cameron!" Mrs. Threepenny-bit exclaims at once. "Go away down and ask him to come up, Peggy."

"Me?" says the girl, in some alarm. "Oh, I couldn't. I don't know him. There might be a mistake."

"Well, I suppose I must go myself," she says, putting back her chair; and therewith

she leaves the room and proceeds downstairs to receive her new visitor.

"I say," observes Miss Peggy, with some disappointment, "if that is Colonel Cameron, he isn't like a soldier at all. He is just like one of those long-legged icicled creatures you see walking in St. James's-street, stiff and starched and polished to the very finger-tips and the toes, and looking at you with a cold blank stare of indifference. Well, this one isn't quite so glacial as that—no, not quite; but it looks odd to see a tall Pall-mall dandy standing at the door of a Stratford hotel."

"Do you know this, Miss Peggy, that if you only got a glimpse of him as you came by, you managed to bring away a pretty faithful portrait. There's not the slightest doubt that that is Sir Ewen Cameron; though what has brought him down in that guise goodness only knows."

There were voices without; the next moment Queen Tita appeared, followed by a tall, thin, sun-tanned person who carried his hat in one hand and his umbrella in the other. When he was introduced to Miss Peggy, his eyes rested on her for a second with a kindly look—as if there had already

been some slight acquaintance between them: no doubt he had guessed that she was of our party when she had passed him below. Then he sate down, and proceeded to explain that he had received our Manageress's telegram in London only the night before, and had come straight away down, the first thing in the morning, to see what was wanted of him. It was clear that her invitation had been too vague; and now when she informed him that we had a berth at his disposal, that we proposed to start at once, and that she hoped he would come along with us for such time as he could spare, he not only accepted her proposal with frank promptitude, but, also, he did not seem to think that so hurried a departure would involve any inconvenience. We should be coming to a town sooner or later? He could telegraph to Aldershot to have a few things sent along.

But, meanwhile, whither had fled our Peggy? She had suddenly gone out of existence—vanished clean away from us and disappeared; and in her place there was now an American young lady whom we could recall as coming in to us of an afternoon in London, to drink a cup of tea and listen with a grave courtesy to anyone who might be

introduced to her. Alas! this was not our Peggy at all, with her mischief, and her wild ways, and her laughing frankness and good-nature; this was a kind of stranger, serious-eyed, and gentle, and attentive; Peggy had gone away from us, and in her stead here was Miss Rosslyn come again: Miss Rosslyn, who would henceforth behave so perfectly and faultlessly that these sylvan haunts we were about to enter would be deprived of half their witchcraft and diablerie. And had not the girl's own instinct been right? Ought we not to have gone away into these secret solitudes entirely by ourselves? Why introduce this new comer to chill the atmosphere, and rob these pastoral glades of all their charm? What had we to do with Camerons, and Lochiels, and pibrochs, and stories of the clans? We had no wish to hear anything "savage and shrill" in the Forest of Arden; we wanted to hear the grass grow—we wanted to hear the fairies blowing their cowslip horns in the dew-wet silence of the summer nights.

"But, you know, Sir Ewen," continued Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with much cheerfulness, "I cannot let you come with us unless you quite understand all the privations you will have to put up with. Don't you think you

ought to go and see the boat; then you would know a little better what to expect?"

"But I heard all about your project before you started," said he, with a kind of gentle persuasiveness, "and I envied you. I never thought I was to be so fortunate as to be asked to join you; and now that I am here, I think your difficulty will be to get rid of me. Oh, I assure you I understand all the conditions of such a trip——"

"Yes; but don't you think you ought to go and see the boat?" she said again. "Wouldn't it be safer? Miss Rosslyn has nothing to do just now—she could walk along with you and show you where it is."

This proposal was made in simple good faith; but the fright that it clearly caused Miss Peggy demanded instant interference.

"No, no; not at all; hurry up with your letters. Sir Ewen won't mind waiting a little while; and then we can all go along together."

"And in the meantime," said our Colonel, "if you don't mind, I think I will go out and see if I can pick up a few boating things—I suppose in a river-side place one may find what one wants. And which did you say was the next town you would come to?"

"Worcester."

"Then I will telegraph to Aldershot when I am out—I suppose I shall find you here when I come back."

The moment he had gone, Mrs. Threepenny-bit turned to her young friend.

"Well?" she said, with a kind of pride.

But Miss Peggy answered nothing.

"Well?" she said again. "What do you think of him, Peggy?"

"Of course I don't know yet," said the young lady, evasively. "I thought he would look more like a soldier; he is like—like anybody else."

"Did you expect to find him wearing his Victoria Cross? Of course he came away just as he was. It is a soldier's pride to be able to start at a moment's notice. And I suppose he will get some of the Piccadilly look taken off before we set out—you may trust a Highlander to forage for himself. By-the-way, won't Murdoch be a proud lad when he hears that Colonel Cameron of Inverfask is going with us; we shall all have to wait upon ourselves now; it's very little attention any of us will get as long as Inverfask is on board."

"Murdoch won't forsake me," observed Miss Peggy, with significant confidence.

And yet with all our hurrying it was near mid-day when we were ready to start; but when we did get away our departure was most auspicious. There was a kind of general elation in setting forth; and then everything looked cheerful in the welcome sunlight; and there were warm, sweet airs blowing about: all promised well. Our Colonel had greatly pleased his hostess with his praises of the arrangements on board; he was delighted with everything, and especially surprised that he could stand upright in the saloon. Then Captain Columbus had been duly complimented on his success in bringing the boat through; and Murdoch, who was at first rather overcome with awe on hearing the name of our new guest, had been driven out of his senses with pride and gratification when Inverfask was considerate enough to address a few words to him in his native tongue; and finally, at the very last moment, a messenger had come running down to the canal-side with a parcel, for which Miss Peggy had been anxiously inquiring since ever she came to Stratford.

"And what is that, Peggy?" asks her hostess, looking at the long thing that has just been handed into the boat.

"Guess."

"Some magical kind of sunshade, is it?"

"No; it's a fishing-rod—an American one; I sent for it a long time ago, and have been wondering whether it was ever going to arrive. They say our American rods are very good; I hope this one will turn out all right."

"And since when have you taken to fishing, Peggy?" she asks.

"Oh, it isn't for myself; it's for him," the young lady answers, indicating a not uninterested bystander.

"Oh, it's for him, is it! Well, he can't wear *that* at his watch-chain!" says Mrs. Spitfire; and therewith she withdraws into the saloon, to beg Colonel Cameron not to bother any more with those Ordnance Survey maps.

And so once more we are gliding on through the still, wooded landscape; and the larks are filling all the wide spaces of the air with their singing; and the sunlight lies warm on the hedges and fields. And this is Miss Peggy, who is perched up here astern, with more or less complete control of the tiller; although, as she seems rather absent-eyed, one has to exercise a general sort of surveillance over her.

"Yes," she is saying, "it was an extraordinary experience. No one who has never been to Stratford could imagine anything of the kind, or could understand how completely Shakespeare occupies and possesses the whole place. It is all Shakespeare; he seems just to fill the town. When you come out of Stratford you come into England again. Now we are back in England."

"But you needn't imagine you are beyond the reach of Shakespeare associations yet, Miss Peggy," one says to her. "Do you see that stretch of country there? Shakespeare had the tithes of it, and was no doubt very prompt in collecting them, for he appears to have been an extremely businesslike person."

"What?—those actual fields!" she says, with quite a new interest.

"Those actual fields and slopes and woods. Over there is Welcombe, and we shall be at Bishopton directly. Now, wasn't it exceedingly generous of Francis Bacon to allow that fifth-rate actor to carry off all the profits of his plays—of Bacon's plays—and come away down here and buy tithes, and houses, and lands?—and yet they say Bacon himself liked money as well as most folk."

But Peggy betrays little interest in Lord

Verulam; she is looking abroad over that tract of country as if it had acquired some new and mysterious value in her eyes.

"Didn't they talk at one time," she asks, "of buying the house that Shakespeare was born in, and taking it over to America? As if that would have been of any use at all!"

"But that was a very small project," one says to her. "Haven't you heard of the new one, that is to signalise the Presidency of Mr. Cleveland? Oh, yes; it's all settled. A country so wealthy as yours can get what it wants; there is nothing that cannot be bought, if you will only pay the price; and they say the subscriptions are already pouring into the White House in streams. The petroleum men are determined to have it; and so are the pork men——"

"But what are you talking about?" she says, coming back from that meditative survey of the distant landscape.

"Westminster Abbey. It is to be taken down stone by stone and shipped across, and put together again over there, monuments and everything. I tell you your country is rich enough to buy anything it wants. Westminster Abbey has to go. It is to be taken over and set up again—in Milwaukee."

"Now you are talking nonsense. But what I say is this," she continues, facing round as if to deliver a challenge, "that if we haven't got Shakespeare's birth-place, and the town and the fields where he lived, at least his literary fame, his position as a poet, belongs quite as much to us Americans as it does to you."

"Really?" one says to this audacious minx; "well, it may be so; but it was a precious lucky thing for Shakespeare that the discontented people who went over to found your country—I don't mean Captain John Smith's rogues and vagabonds, but the Nonconformists—it was a precious lucky thing for Shakespeare that they hadn't their own way here in this country, or there wouldn't have been a single player allowed to ply his trade. And where would have been the buying of tithes then? And the purchase of New Place? And the conveyancing of messuages and tenements and orchards and gardens?"

"Why, what's that?" she exclaims suddenly, catching sight of something ahead.

"It looks like a series of gigantic steps and stairs, doesn't it?—but it is really a succession of locks. We have got to climb a hill, that's about all. And it will be a very tedious

process. You'd better go inside and tell them we will have lunch now, and send Murdoch out to take the tiller."

We found luncheon an admirable method of passing the time necessary to get through this great bunch of locks (though we could have dispensed with a little of the bumping going on outside); and now it was that Miss Peggy was brought more immediately into contact with our new guest, who had been informing himself of our probable route by the study of maps. But she was a little silent. She did not display towards him anything of the quiet self-confidence which ordinarily characterised her manner in the presence of strangers. Once or twice she glanced timidly at him as he was talking to Queen Tita; whereas her custom was to look straight at people, especially if they were indifferent to her. Nor was there in her own conversation—with the person sitting next her—any trace of that careless wilfulness with which we had grown familiar. Where were her jibes now? She was distressingly well-behaved. And yet surely there was nothing in the manner or discourse of this tall and elderly soldier to strike dismay into a sensitive young soul: on the contrary, whenever the talk became

general, and he looked across the table, as if addressing her also, his eyes seemed to regard her in a pleased and friendly fashion, as if they were saying, "Oh, yes; our acquaintance has been happily begun; we shall soon be friends—perhaps we are already."

And on this occasion, so far from playing Captain Bobadil, or magnifying his own profession, all his speech—prompted by a question of Queen Tita's about the possible intentions of the French Republic—was of the mischief wrought by newspapers in fanning national antipathies and goading nations into war. And here one was enabled to afford him unexpected corroboration.

"Wait a moment, Cameron; I have a story to tell you," says one of us. "Once upon a time there was a person—we will call him A. —maintaining that very position before a lot of people; and they wouldn't believe him. Very well: to convince them of the way in which mischief is caused by newspapers provoking quarrels, he said he would undertake, himself, to get up a perfectly brand-new international dispute in three weeks. Within three weeks, he declared he would have England and Germany at loggerheads—not England and Germany, of course, but the

English and German newspapers, which fortunately is a very different thing. Well, first of all he went to a German friend of his, whom we will call B. 'Look here,' says he, 'let's get up a row between Germany and England about something or other. You'll start it in Germany, and I'll take it up here; and then they'll all be at it directly, for of course no one newspaper will confess that it doesn't know what is going on.' 'But about what?' says B. 'Oh, anything; never mind what. Say Germany wants Heligoland.' 'All right.' Then the worthy Herr Doctor—it is some years since, mind, and both A. and B. were younger when they played that prank—he proceeded to write a very pathetic article about Heligoland, and he made no scruple about altering the well-known old rhyme so that it ran—

'Fern ist der Strand,
Weiss ist der Sand,
Das ist des Deutschen Heligoland!'

That article was printed in a Cologne paper. Immediately afterwards there appeared in a London daily paper another article, saying that the long-cherished desire on the part of the German people for the acquisition of

Heligoland was again taking voice; and that aspirations which had for so long been merely sentimental promised now to become a serious demand, that would have to be faced by English statesmen. Then appeared a second article in the Cologne paper calling attention to the manner in which England was regarding Germany's now formulated claim. Of course, by this time the other papers were not to be left out in the cold. The question of the cession of Heligoland to Germany was taken up everywhere; statements that it had been discussed at Cabinet meetings were made, and authoritatively contradicted; one weekly paper, with tears in its eyes, appealed to Germany not to misuse her newly-found strength in the prosecution of such an invidious demand, but said if she came forward in a peaceable way, and argued the matter upon moral grounds, then perhaps we might be persuaded to restore the island to the Danes. Descriptive articles began to appear; there were pictures of Heligoland in the illustrated papers; and discussion everywhere. What was the worth of it to England? What good would it do to Germany? Were German statesmen so arrogant that they must have this little bit of an island, just because

they fancied it, and in spite of all considerations of history and race? What kind of argument was it to bring forward a bit of half-forgotten rhyme? The German journals said it was only a high-principled and sincere country like England that could continue, with a satisfied conscience, to hold such alien possessions as Gibraltar, Heligoland, Cyprus, and Malta. One English paper said it was understood that our Foreign Secretary attached no great importance to our keeping Heligoland, and was not inclined to contest the claim, if Germany insisted; another had it on the very best authority that the Foreign Secretary had expressed no opinion whatever on the subject. And meanwhile, while all this was going on, A. and B. met every other evening at the Culturverein, and smiled a little—like two Augurs—over their Hochheimer and cigars."

"And what came of it all?" says the Colonel.

"Oh, nothing; it died away. The thunder rumbled off; but even now, from time to time, you may hear a faint echo of it; and just as likely as not you'll find that perverted rhyme cropping up at the same time—though sometimes they print it—

"'Fern ist der Strand,
Weiss ist der Sand
Das ist das deutsche Heligoland!'"

"Peggy," observed Mrs. Threepenny-bit, regarding the girl with a world of meaning in her eyes: "they say that open confession is good for the soul."

And it is very likely that Miss Peggy would have answered with some remark equally impertinent, uncalled-for, and unjust; but that the presence of Colonel Cameron seemed to impose a wholesome restraint upon her. Indeed, she made no answer at all; she discovered that we were in the last of the locks; and her proposal that we should seize the opportunity to get ashore was unanimously and immediately adopted.

We now found ourselves on a considerable height; and all around us lay a richly-wooded country, the abundant foliage of which kept shimmering or darkening as the slow-moving sun-rays and wide shadows trailed across the landscape. Over there, on the horizon line, were Bearley Bushes and Smitherfield; here, as we leisurely followed the windings of the canal, were Wilmecot, and Gipsey Hill, and Newnham. Then we came to a long, straight aqueduct spanning a spacious valley; and far

below us, in the hollow, was a line of railway —that going down to Alcester. The view from this point was one of the most extensive we had as yet encountered—the successive undulations of wood and spinney and grassy slope receding away into the south, where the low-lying hills, underneath the milk-white skies, were of a pale, ethereal blue. Moreover, this canal, that was leading us into the wide district once known as the Forest of Arden, was very little like a canal. It seemed to be entirely disused and forsaken. We met with neither barge nor boat of any description. Here and there the still waters were almost choked with all kinds of aquatic plants; here and there were masses of the floating white buttercup, in blossom. A solitary neighbourhood this was, and a silent; yet there was a kind of persuasive charm in its very loneliness; while, for the rest, the afternoon was growing mellower in colour, and lending a warmer tone to all these masses of foliage. Miss Peggy, as we walked along, spoke but little; perhaps she was peopling those woods, and open spaces, and darker glades, with mysterious phantoms. Her eyes, at any rate, had no mischief in them now.

But as we drew near to Wootton Wawen—

which is only about a mile or so from Henley-in-Arden—she turned her attention to the wildflowers we were passing, and from time to time she stooped to add to the little nosegay in her hand. We knew her purpose. We knew whither was going that variegated little collection of red campions, blue hyacinths, yellow bed-straw, purple self-heal, golden cowslips, and the like simple blossoms.

"It is a very little trouble," she says (as if any apology were necessary), "and think of the gratitude I shall reap when they get them over there! I suppose I may honestly say, 'From the Forest of Arden' in the letter?"

"Undoubtedly this was part of the ancient Forest of Arden, if that is what you mean—it stretched over the half of Warwickshire," one makes answer. "I don't know when the district was disafforested; but in Shakespeare's own time they hunted red-deer in these Warwickshire woods—you'll find it all described in the 'Polyolbion'—'our old Arden here' is Drayton's phrase; and he was a Warwickshire man. Yes; I think you may fairly say these flowers are from the Forest of Arden."

"That is all I wanted to know. And yet," she continues, "I am not sure it would be kind to send any of them to my sister Emily.

It seems such a shame that I should be seeing all these places, while she is at home."

"Her time will come, surely. She will be in England some day."

"But who will take her about like this?" Miss Peggy is good enough to say. "Do you think, now, there ever was an American here before?"

"In this precise spot? I should think it was highly improbable."

She was silent for a minute or two as we were walking along.

"I suppose our people would want to rush through. Well; it is very strange, when you get used to this dream-like kind of existence, how very natural it seems; and how far away the outside world seems to be. I wonder, when I am back in New York, whether I shall be able to recall the feeling of being lost, and being quite happy in being lost? All the people and things I used to know seem to be gone—or in an outside ring so far away that you hardly ever hope to get back to it. And yet," adds Miss Peggy, with a smile, "I don't feel in the least bit miserable to find myself cut off from the rest of the world, and forgotten, and alone."

"You are not quite alone."

"No; not quite," she says; and then she goes on, in a very simple and natural fashion: "Do you know, I like your friend the Colonel."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. I like him. He doesn't try to show off."

"Did you think he would?"

"And I'm not so much afraid of him as I expected. No, hardly at all; he is so quiet; and—and—I like the way he looks at you—he doesn't scrutinise—he has a pleasant way of looking at you. What do people say of him?"

"The public, do you mean—the newspapers?"

"No, no; the people who know him."

"Well; he bears the reputation of being a pretty strict disciplinarian; but his men are said to be extraordinarily devoted to him all the same; and I know his brother officers are rather fond of him. I remember a young fellow one night at the Rag—at dinner—saying simply enough, 'Well; I don't *like* Cameron; that isn't it: I love him.'"

"Is it long since his wife died?"

"Yes; some years."

"Was she pretty?"

"She was very good-looking. She was one of the Lennoxes of Coulterhill—they're all a handsome family."

"How old is he?" continues this inquisitive young person; indeed, that is one of her peculiarities; when she is interested, however slightly, in anyone, she must needs know all about his or her situation in life, and surroundings, and prospects—perhaps for the better spinning of aimless little romances.

"How old is he? Oh, he is just everybody's age. Don't you know that there is a long period—an interval between being insignificantly young and distressingly old—in which all nice people and all interesting people dwell, without particularly counting years. You may call it the broad platform of life, if you like; and a few Mays or Decembers are not allowed to count. Colonel Cameron is just in the middle of existence—like the rest of us——"

"Oh, do you take me in, too?" she says.

"Why, certainly. Do you call yourself insignificantly young?"

"But I want to be counted in!" she says promptly. "I like to have plenty of company. I should prefer being with the happy majority. Oh, yes; I want to be on the middle platform, with the rest of the people."

"If it comes to that, young lady, there are two or three little tricks and artifices in which you are a good deal older than Ewen Cameron, or any one of us."

"Ah, don't say that!" she pleads, with much pathos. "I have been so good!"

"I suppose you wrote a very pretty letter to that long-coated metaphysician, thanking him for all the information he sent you."

"Indeed I did not, then," she says warmly. "I did not write to him at all. For I did not ask him to send us any information; I suppose we could have got it out of the guide-books in any case."

But meanwhile, as we had been thus leisurely strolling along, the waning day had been still further deepening in colour. Overhead the silvery-grey heavens were now mottled with soft lilac; towards the west were long bands of purple cloud, their lower edges fringed with crimson fire; beneath these, and behind the various clumps of foliage in front of us, were breadths of golden-yellow, that only reached us through the darkened branches in mild flashes of light. We had been seriously delayed, moreover, by one or two difficult bridges, particularly in the neighbourhood of Lowsom Ford; and now, as these

fires were fading out, and as Captain Columbus had discovered that somewhere not very far away he could get stabling for the horse, it was resolved to call a halt for the night. We were to be up betimes in the morning, for there was a long day before us, to say nothing of the wild peril and adventure of getting through the King's Norton and West Hill Tunnels. So we chose out a meadow-bank where there were some convenient willow-stumps and alder-bushes, and there we made fast; and then Murdoch—now in the Forest of Arden, and probably wishing he were at home in a better place, though his courtesy would not allow him to say so—was besought to prepare some food for his co-mates and brothers in exile.

A ceremony, of deepest interest to at least one person present, now took place. It was at Miss Peggy's timid suggestion. Wouldn't one like to put the American trout-rod together, to see whether it met with approval? If it were not quite satisfactory, she said, she could have it changed. And here was a stretch of smooth water; hadn't we anything in the shape of a line? Now as we had brought plenty of all kinds of tackle with us—on chance—we made pretty sure of

finding a small reel that would fit; and there was still enough light in this gathering dusk to show us how the line went out.

And what a dainty toy did this turn out to be, when we pulled the circular shaft from out its furry cover, and found in the grooves of the shaft the light-golden, hexagonal pieces of spliced cane all neatly packed; and who could have aught but admiration—were he fisherman or no fisherman—for the delicately ribbed handle, and the silver ferrules and rings, and the small, shining bands of rose-red silk? The inscription on the metal portion of the butt, too: really, when one had put this work of art together, and had taken a single glance at it, it was quite apparent that it was far too bright and good for human nature's daily food. What?—make this beautiful little golden toy, with its rose-red silk and its silver sockets, an instrument to thrash the sullen surface of a Scotch loch, in hours of driving rain, with the heavy storm-clouds coming lower and lower down the hillside, and darkening the world as they descended? No, no; the proper place for such a thing of beauty was a corner of the hall, in alliance with the various trophies of the chase, so that young ladies, on their way from the dining-room to

the drawing-room, might be invited to admire its elegance, and pliancy, and pretty colour. To take this dainty thing out for any kind of actual work? Why, it might get wet!

And yet, when we had rummaged about and found a reel small enough to be attached to the butt, it was very speedily discovered that this plaything of a rod had a remarkable faculty for sending out a line. Perhaps it wasn't so much of a toy, after all? If it felt a little "whippy" at first, the hand soon got used to that; and it was most satisfactory to stand here in the dusk and watch how easily the undulating line went out and how lightly —with a touch like a butterfly—it fell on the wan water. Our Colonel tried a cast or two, and declared that, for this delicate kind of work, it was a most excellent instrument. Miss Peggy was also allowed a little practice; and as there was nothing attached to the line there was no risk of her hanging up artificial flies on the trees and bushes as thickly as ever Orlando hung up his rhymes when he was wandering through these very glades. Finally, Mrs. Threepenny-bit got the pretty plaything into her possession; but this was with a view to reading the inscription on

the silver band; and she affected to be greatly surprised by its simplicity.

"Well, I declare! not a single scrap of poetry. Why, Peggy, you might have quoted a line or two just to please him—'When this you see, remember me'; or, 'The rose is red, the violet's blue, the grass is green, and so are you.' Or a motto, even—'Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight?'"

"I think you are very impertinent," says Miss Peggy, with an air of much dignity; and she takes away the rod from that envious scrap of a creature, and offers to help in putting it back in its case.

During dinner that night—whether it was the sensation of solitariness inspired by these lonely neighbourhoods, or whether it was that her fear of the tall Colonel had not quite worn off—Miss Peggy was again rather silent, listening with a respectful attention, but rarely saying anything. Of course, she was not entirely dumb; and one chance remark she made—as coming from a person of so retiring a disposition—seemed to strike Colonel Cameron with a little surprise. By accident he had gone back to the subject of the various incitements to war, and was talking to Queen Tita about the times when the love of

this or that fair lady was a common cause of strife. One of us happened to say that he had heard of a tournament in our own day—or rather, a joust—of a very idyllic nature. It was a lady in the north, who had two suitors, both of them in every way eligible, and both of them equally pressing in their suit; and, to settle the matter, she said she would marry the one who wrote the best poem on Mary, Queen of Scots. She was as good as her word; and married the successful competitor. Whereupon Miss Peggy remarked quietly—

"I am pretty sure she knew beforehand which of them could write the best poem; and that was why she took that way of deciding."

Well, it was a shrewd remark for a young woman to make; and Colonel Cameron glanced up with the least touch of surprise: you see, she had been so very modest and quiet and unassuming since he had joined our party. But we were privately of opinion that before very long Inverfask would find out for himself that our Peggy—though quite a Characterless Person—was no fool.

And fortunate it was for us that this subject had been started; for in speaking of this or the other noble lady whose name was con-

nected in legend or history with some tragic deed, Cameron happened to ask his hostess if she knew the ballad of "The Twa Bonnie Gordons."

"I dare say you will know the story," he said, "for there are two or three ballads about it—'Gordon o' Bracklay,' I think one of them is called, or 'The Baron o' Bracklay.' But this version I have has never been in print, as far as I know, and I think it is finer than any of them. My mother used to sing it—to a very singular and pathetic air: let me see—I think I could repeat the words to you——"

"Oh, will you?" she said quickly.

"It is hardly a pleasant story they have to tell; but the ballad is fine—as fine as any I know:—

"'"Down Deeside rode Inveray, whistling and playing,
He called loud at Brackla gate ere the day's dawing,
"O Gordon of Brackla, proud Gordon, come down,
There's a sword at your threshold mair sharp than your own."'"

He repeated these lines almost in an undertone, and slowly—perhaps to give the two women-folk a better chance of making out the Scotch; but as he went on there was a curiously vibrant quality in his voice that made his recitation singularly impressive:—

"'Arise now, gay Gordon!' his lady 'gan cry,
'For there is fierce Inveray driving your kye:'
'How can I go, lady, and win them again,
When I have but ae sword where he has got ten?'

'Arise now, my maidens, leave rock and leave fan;
How blest had I been had I married a man!—
Arise now, my maidens, take lance and take sword:
Go, milk the ewes, Gordon, for I shall be lord!'

Up sprang the brave Gordon, put his helm on his head,
Laid his hand on his sword, and his thigh o'er his steed;
But he stooped low and said, as he kissed his proud dame:
'There's a Gordon rides out that will never ride hame.'

There rode wi' fierce Inveray thirty and three,
And nane wi' the Gordon save his brother and he;
Twa gallanter Gordons did never sword draw,
But against three-and-thirty, wae's me! what were twa!

Wi' swords and wi' daggers they rushed on them rude,
And the twa bonnie Gordons lay bathed in their bluid;
Frae the mouth o' the Dee to the source o' the Spey,
The Gordons mourn for them and curse Inveray.

'O came ye by Brackla, and what saw ye there?
Was the young widow weeping and tearing her hair?'
'I came down by Brackla; I looked in, and oh!
There was mirth, there was feasting, but naething o' woe.

'Like a rose bloomed the lady and blithe as a bride;
A bridegroom young Inveray stood by her side;
She feasted him there as she ne'er feasted lord,
Though the bluid o' her husband was red on his sword.

O there's dule in the cottage, if there's mirth in the ha',
For the twa bonnie Gordons who are deid and awa';
To the bush comes the bud, and the flower to the plain,
But the twa gallant Gordons come never again."

When he had finished, there was a second of silence; and then it was Peggy who spoke.

"I—I hope he killed her!" the girl said—with white lips.

A little later on—well, perhaps, there was a half-confessed feeling that this fierce and piteous story had been all too terrible for these tranquil solitudes—anyhow, it was Miss Peggy who timidly suggested that we should get outside to see what the night was like, and perhaps go ashore, also, for a stroll through the meadows and lanes, if any such were to be found. So forthwith we went—Sir Ewen lighting a big cigar by way of preparation; but as for going ashore, the first one who tried that discovered that the grass was soaking wet with dew. Accordingly we all of us with much content took up our places in the stern-sheets of the boat: with much content, for the night-air was sweet, and there was a silence not disturbed by the stirring of a leaf, and there were dark glades and vistas between the trees which, if one liked, one could people with all kinds of spectral figures, who could perform a ghostly play for us.

The contrast between that still darkness all around and the crimson glow of our little floating home was strange enough. Sitting

out here, we were spectators of both; indeed, not only could we look into the glare of light within—which seemed to illumine a fairy palace—but also we could see where some of the softened radiance, streaming through the windows, touched here and there a branch of alder or a willow-stump. But if these glades near at hand were steeped in the shadow of overhanging leaves, the heavens above us were clear and cloudless, the great vault palpitating with myriad upon myriad of stars. There sat Cassiopeia on her silver throne; the jewel Rastaben burned fierce on the forehead of the Dragon; the pale Andromeda was there, and Perseus with uplifted sword; the brilliant Vega gleamed on the invisible strings of the Harp; and the shining wonders of the Plough, white, trembling, and yet constant, throbbed in the pure ether. All the life of the world seemed to be in those lambent skies; there was nothing here around us but impalpable gloom and death. That impression lasted but for a minute or two. Perhaps it was our coming forth from the saloon that had startled the woods into silence. Anyhow, the next moment a sudden sound sprang into the night, flooding all the darkness with its rich and piercing melody—*jug, jug, jug—jug,*

jug, jug, tir-o-ee—a joyous, clear, full-throated note, deep-gurgling now, and again rising with thrills and tremors into bursts of far-reaching silver song that seemed to shake the hollow air. A single nightingale had filled the woods with life. We cared no more for those distant and silent stars. It was enough to sit here in the gracious quiet, and listen to the eager tremulous outpouring of this honeyed sound—and to remember that we were in the Forest of Arden.

CHAPTER V.

"Did I but purpose to embark with thee
On the smooth surface of a summer's sea;
While gentle Zephyrs play in prosperous gales,
And Fortune's favour fills the swelling sails;
But would forsake the ship, and make the shore,
When the winds whistle, and the tempests roar?
No, Henry, no: one sacred oath has tied
Our loves; one destiny our life shall guide;
Nor wild nor deep our common way divide."

In the dim lands that lie between sleeping and waking, and while as yet the dawn is low in the eastern skies, there are shadows moving hither and thither, and a sound as of music echoing down the forest glades. Fainter and fainter it grows. The booted and belted figures, with their garments of green and feathered caps, melt away into the distance—"*The horn, the horn, the lusty, lusty horn,*" is hardly heard now—and at last the hoarse chorus ceases, and there is silence. Silence but for a moment; for here is the

gay-hearted and merry-tongued Rosalind, in russet cloak and velvet cap, followed by her bewildered lover. "Bid your friends," she says to him; "for if you will be married to-morrow, you shall; and to Rosalind, if you will." Then scarcely have they gone when there is a blowing of silver bugles; slowly and gradually richly-clad figures come trooping in; a magic light awakes: these are no longer glades in the forest, but spacious halls; and the bridal guests have arrived. A murmur passes through the crowd. The blaze of light falls upon a figure in white satin and silks and pearls; and, as the Duke leads her forward, her veil is partly removed, and the shining-eyed and smiling and queen-like Rosalind, now blushing as a bride, and yet imperious in her very yielding, advances to her lover with outstretched hand. "To you I give myself, for I am yours." And again there is a hushed sound of music—of stringed instruments this time—and presently the brilliant assemblage is moving slowly through a dance, but ever with the radiant white figure attracting all eyes. As one looks and listens, the gay-coloured company grows paler: the music, too—there is something strange about it—it is a monotonous sound—*ur-r-r-r-r-r*—and

then again the calling of a cuckoo—*cuckoo, cuckoo*—as if we were still in the woods. And whither has gone that glare of light? There are wan greys appearing—and wide spaces; the bridal party has dispersed; a new day has dawned. And now we know: the cuckoo is calling to us from out the dripping leaves; the *ur-r-r-r-r* is a continuous rattling on the roof above us; those magic fires have been extinguished by the heavy rain; and the ghosts have vanished back into the night.

"For the last two mortal hours, I do believe," says our Colonel, as he is tying his shoes in the cramped cabin, "that brute has been at it! Fancy a cuckoo calling in such a deluge! It can only be to make a fool of us."

And when one at length is dressed, and ready, and goes into the saloon, perhaps it is with some vague curiosity to see whether our own flesh-and-blood Rosalind in any way resembles that spectral white-satined Rosalind of the dawn. One finds Miss Peggy alone, and up at the further end of the saloon. What she has been about is clear. There are branches of alder projecting from the bank; she has opened the window just far enough to draw some of them inside and spread them

across the pane; and is now contemplating that ingenious piece of decoration. When she turns round to say "Good morning," her first concern is to dry her dripping fingers and wrists.

"A pleasant morning, Miss Peggy!"

"Oh! I don't mind," she says, with her usual cheerful carelessness. "After such a night as last night, I am ready to forgive anything. Besides, where should you have patience with the weather if not here? 'The penalty of Adam—the season's difference.' I'm ready to take what comes. There's another thing: when it does rain, I like to hear it rain like that; a good business-like downpour means to have it out and done with it. You'll see we shall have a fine day; I'm certain of it."

No; there was very little that was phantasmal about this highly matter-of-fact and well-contented personage. Perhaps if she had been clad in the costume which she wore for a few minutes that evening at Stratford, she might have looked a little like the dream-Rosalind who was figuring about in this neighbourhood before the day broke; but she was a much more actual and substantial individuality than the shining bride who had

paled and vanished with the coming of the dawn. There was a healthful and wholesome pink in her peach-soft cheek that spectres do not possess; the light that shone in her eyes (and that was sufficiently bright for all practical purposes) was not borrowed from any unholy glare; besides, there was a self-confidence and a cool audacity in her demeanour that no well-behaved ghost would display—for ghosts, if they are anything at all, are sensitive, shrinking, retiring creatures. Nor do ghosts — well-behaved ghosts — try to whistle when they are drying their fingers.

"Hallo! what's that?" says Miss Peggy, turning suddenly round.

A slight scraping noise had attracted her attention. And now what do we behold?—what but those branches of alder being slowly withdrawn by an invisible hand. She regards this extraordinary phenomenon for a second—until the last leaf has disappeared—and then the truth flashes upon her.

"The boat is moving! Are we off already?"

It is even so. For it appears that Captain Columbus, being anxious for an early start, has come quietly down through the meadows, unmoored the Nameless Barge, and is now,

from the stern, poling her across to the tow-path, where the horse and horse-marine are waiting. Perhaps it has not hitherto been explained in this veracious chronicle that we invariably chose our moorings on the side opposite the tow-path, so that, in the improbable event of any barge coming along in the night, we should not be run into. Moreover, this also removed from us the possibility of visitors, if visitors there could be in regions that showed no sign of human life.

At breakfast, all assembled, the chief topic of discussion is naturally the tunnels we shall have to encounter some time or other during the day; and Mrs. Threepenny-bit, from certain things she has heard, seems a little apprehensive. Not so Miss Peggy.

"Why should you distrust the boat?" the young lady says. "Hasn't she done very well so far? There has been no danger at all, except once or twice when she tilted over a bit, and that did nothing but break a few dishes. Why should you think there was any risk in going through tunnels?"

"The risk is this, Miss Peggy," one says to her. "The West Hill Tunnel, according to Captain Columbus, is over a mile and a half long, and it is absolutely dark. We shall

most likely be tacked on to the end of a long string of barges—for we shall be on the Worcester and Birmingham Canal then—barges that have been waiting for the steam-launch; and the tail of a long sea-serpent of that kind is just as likely as not to flop about considerably, especially as we shall be such a light appendage to those heavy craft. Well, suppose she gets an extra hard knock against the wall of the tunnel? One thing is positively certain, that, if she were to fill and sink, every person on board must inevitably be drowned. How could you be picked up in the darkness? Besides, the people on board the steam-launch wouldn't know anything of what was happening; they would continue to haul away, even supposing the boat was under water."

"Surely," said our Colonel, "if she were to sink, the drag would soon make itself felt."

"Yes; but where would you be in the meantime? However, I put these considerations before you people not for the purpose of frightening you, but in order to recommend to you a little common sense. There is no need why any of you should run a quite unnecessary risk. Only one person need be on board the boat, to steer. Very well; the owner of this noble craft proposes to accept

that responsibility, for the better security of his own property. All you people — and Columbus and Murdoch as well; for the Horse-Marine will have gone on with the horse—you people will be safely on board the steam-launch: that is how you ought to go through."

"Amongst a lot of Birmingham bargemen!" cries Queen Tita. "They'll be all fighting and swearing!"

"If you allow me to accompany you," Colonel Cameron says, in his quiet way, "I think you may make me answerable for the preservation of the Queen's peace."

"Please," says Miss Peggy, looking up, and addressing the person who proposes to take charge of the boat through the tunnels, "if I'm not in the way, may I stay with you?"

"How touching! How very touching!" observes Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with her usual gratuitous malice. "It quite reminds one of the devotion and constancy of the Nut Brown Maid. Oh, quite touching!"

At this impertinent taunt the young lady blushes vividly (which she would not have done had it been uttered in the presence of Jack Duncombe), and hastily she makes answer—

"I want to see the fun, that's all."

"Well, now," says Colonel Cameron, to sum up the matter, "do you think it is worth while for any one of us to desert the ship? A little spice of danger is rather pleasant at times; and, if there is such a thing, we ought all to run an equal chance, don't you think? Of course, if you ladies would rather go on board the steam-launch, I will go with you——"

"I, for one," observes Queen Tita, in distinct tones, "am not going on board any steam-launch—among those men."

"And I would much rather remain here," says the Nut Brown Maid, modestly.

"Very well," he says, "that is a bargain; we will stay and keep the steersman company. And I don't think you will find either Murdoch or Captain Columbus wanting to run away."

When we went outside after breakfast we found the morning had cleared up wonderfully; there were breaks of vivid blue overhead; shafts of sunlight here and there; and a brisk wind stirring the foliage of the wide, richly-wooded country. By this time we had got on to Kingswood Junction, where the Birmingham and Warwick and Birmingham

and Stratford canals are connected; and shortly thereafter, as we struck away to the north-west, we had to climb a series of steps and stairs, getting thereby into a long level stretch of ten miles without a single lock to bar our way. This was a very beautiful landscape that lay all around us, if it was not particularly romantic or impressive; and the day was growing finer and finer; indeed, the sun was almost too hot at times, and we were glad of the cool wind that stirred the trees and put a silver ripple on the water. Occasionally the woods seemed to close in upon us; the light breeze did not get at the surface of the canal: on the contrary, that perfect mirror reflected every leaf and twig and branch of the overhanging oak and alder and ash. Now and again we came to a little old-fashioned bridge, of weather-tinted red brick—a pleasant colour among all these greens. And then we would find ourselves between steep and high banks, all hanging with leaves and tendrils and Spring blossom —here and there a golden blaze of furze or broom, more rarely a cream-white mass of the sweet-smelling hawthorn. Of course we were all ashore now, sometimes overtaking the boat, sometimes allowing it to glide far ahead

of us—the only living and moving thing in the solitary world. This part of the country is rich in song-birds. All the air was filled with their singing; near and far, from bush and copse and hawthorn bough, and from the wide white spaces of the sky, poured an inexhaustible stream of melody, a universal rejoicing after the rain. And Miss Peggy was singing, too, at times, in a careless fashion, when you happened to cease chatting to her, or when she stooped to gather speedwells from the warm and sunny banks. "O, it's I was a walking one morning in May"—this was what she was at; and probably she was not in the least conscious that she was in a measure imitating Jack Duncombe, any more than she was aware that those speedwells she was gathering were not anything near so blue and translucent as her eyes.

"Well," she said, at last, when she had gathered her little nosegay, and was free to walk on without more ado; "it was very nice of them."

"Nice of whom?"

"Why, the people who cut this winding lane through all this beautiful country, and then filled it with water so that you could float along it, and then left it for us. It was very

kind of them, and very lucky for us that we can have it all to ourselves."

"Wait till you get on to the Birmingham and Worcester—you'll have some company then."

"Rough company? No, I don't think so. All those I have seen have been very civil."

"It doesn't much matter. I have told you before, if there's any bad language, you won't understand a word of it—it will be in the dark dialect of Brummagem."

"Talking about bad language," Miss Peggy says, in her off-hand way, "do you know why it's useless to try to block up the river Niagara?"

"Oh, go away with your preposterous conundrums!"

"But, really, can't you guess?" she says, with innocent eyes. "And why should you despise conundrums? Is it because you're not very clever at finding them out?"

"Well, there's something in that. As you grow a little older, young lady, and gather experience of the world's ways, you'll find that the great majority of people comfort themselves by despising everything of which they are ignorant and everything they can't do. It's a wholesome rule of life; it makes for

content. Suppose you can't hit a haystack at thirty yards and can't throw a fly, your best plan is to call field-sports brutalising, and a survival of the instincts of the savage. Suppose, on the other hand, you can shoot and fish and ride to hounds and all the rest of it, and yet you can't make anything out of Carpaccio, then you may safely call lovers of the fine arts æsthetes, prigs, and effeminate creatures generally. If you can't drink wine, elevate your abstinence into a religion, and look upon yourself as a marvel of virtue; if you can't get on without wine, you may hint that teetotallers, if all were known, might be found to be no better than they should be. If you are a scientific person——"

"I'm not," says Peggy.

"Don't interrupt. If you are a scientific person, you can make light of the practical value of the Greek and Latin literatures; if you are learned in the humanities, you may call science a mere blind empiricism—the workings of a mole in the dark. If you're a plain woman, you can't be expected to approve of wax dolls; if you're a pretty woman, you may suggest that the plain women would prefer to be a little more like wax dolls if they could. It is a pleasing habit—and wide-

spread; it tends to the general comfort and content."

"And that is why you don't like conundrums?" continues Miss Peggy (who does not seem so much impressed by this sermon as she might be). "Because you can't find them out? Well, I wouldn't confess, if I were you. I would rather try a little. Come, now, I'll make it easy for you. I'll give you a friendly lead. Why is it you needn't try to block up the Niagara river—put a hindrance across it, don't you see?—something to stop it——"

"Oh, get away with your nonsense!"

"But don't you see the answer?—think a moment! It's as plain as anything! Must I tell you, then? The reason you needn't try to block up the river Niagara?—well, because dam it you can't!"

One contemplates this person. She is young; and fair to look upon. There is even an appearance of maiden guilelessness on the smooth white forehead and in the shining eyes. But how so seemly an exterior can enclose a mental and moral nature so lost to all sense of shame is a problem too distressing to face. One walks on in silence.

"Of course," she remarks proudly, "if you

choose to put wicked meanings into what I say, I can't help it."

"Live and learn," one answers her. "It is always pleasant to watch the new development of manners—the conduct of the coming generation. And I wonder what Colonel Cameron will think——"

In an instant her attitude is entirely changed.

"Ah, you wouldn't be so mean!"

"Don't you think he would be interested?" one asks of her impartially. "A kind of small revelation in its way?"

"No," she says—and her earnestness of entreaty is not wholly a pretence—"you're capable of a good lot, but not of *that*. You couldn't be so mean! Tales told out of school! Well, look here, if you will promise not to repeat that to Colonel Cameron, I will promise never to ask you another conundrum as long as I live. And I've got some very good ones," she adds, demurely.

"Where did you get them? From some funny young man in Brooklyn?"

"No, it wasn't—it was from a girl."

"What kind of a girl?"

"I won't tell you her name; you would recognise it. She made several of them herself."

"And all of the same character?"

"Most of them. Well," continues Miss Peggy, with returning confidence, "there's really no harm in them, except what you choose to put there. Not a bit of harm. Say, are you going to write a book about this trip?"

"It is possible."

"If you do, will you tell those things about me?"

"I daren't tell *all* I know about you—certainly not."

"Ah, but that's just what I want!" she says. "If you told everything, I should have nothing to fear. If you told *everything*, then the reader would recognise before him the picture of an absolutely perfect human being. That's me. I have always been like that; and you know it; for I have told you before. But I dare say you will go and distort things, and make me out a villain if you can, whereas you know better, if you would only be honest."

She had got a bit of thread, and as she walked along she was tying the speedwells together.

"I wonder, now, if you can guess why Robinson Crusoe was startled when he saw the footprint in the sand?"

"I thought you made a promise a little while ago," one says to her.

"Oh, that's all very well," rejoins this impenitent creature. "Why, you are just dying to hear some more of them. But you sha'n't. I won't tell you another one. And then, of course, if you do say a word to Colonel Cameron—but no, you couldn't be so mean as that, even if you tried."

Then she adds irrelevantly—

"I say, are you going to let me stay outside and see what's going on, while we are in those tunnels?"

"If you are good; and if you put on a waterproof."

"Well, shouldn't we get into the boat again, and have everything ready? Besides, I have a letter to write that I want to have posted at King's Norton."

It was not, however, until a long time after that—and after some miles of pleasant sailing through a richly-cultivated and cheerful-looking country—that we drew near to the first of the tunnels. This was found to be a sufficiently simple affair; moreover, we had the whole passage to ourselves; for we were still on the Birmingham and Stratford Canal, where we had encountered but little traffic. And yet it

was with a strange and eerie feeling that we left the warm white air and shot under this low archway into a cold and clammy darkness that was pierced far away ahead by a needle-point of light. Our method of propelling the boat is technically known on the canals as "legging"; that is to say, Captain Columbus and Murdoch lay on their backs on the roof of the saloon, and shoved with their feet against the dripping brickwork encircling us. We made no great speed; in fact, there was so little way on the boat that steering was next to impossible: on the other hand, there was an abundance of bumping from side to side, though our Colonel did his best, with one of the poles, to mitigate these concussions. And thus we crept along.

"Why, it's nothing at all!" said Miss Peggy—her voice echoing strangely in this hollow-sounding vault. "Where is the danger!"

She was answered by the boat again swinging against the side of the tunnel in a fashion that would probably have tipped her into the water had she not been clinging on to the iron rod; but she still maintained there was nothing to be afraid of; and also that the mysterious light somehow reminded her of Venice.

But all this while the white pin-point far ahead of us had been gradually growing larger and more brilliant; still larger and larger it grew, until it seemed to be a sort of circular channel leading out into a bewildering glare of greenish-yellow; we could make out more clearly now our environment of moist and dripping brickwork; and then, with a kind of soft glory dazzling our eyes, we slowly emerged into the warm glowing world again, to find ourselves surrounded by hanging masses of sunlit foliage.

Murdoch rose from his recumbent position on the roof, and looked back at the tunnel through which we had come.

"It's an ahfu' place that," we heard him say, in awe-stricken tones, to Captain Columbus—doubtless he had never been in a tunnel in his life before.

"Oh! that's nothing, lad," said Columbus, who was now also standing erect, and shaking the grit and water from his clothes. "That's only a baby tunnel. Wait till you come to the West Hill."

Then we went on to King's Norton; and, having to post Miss Peggy's letter, we strolled along and up to the village. We found it a quaint, little, out-of-the-world-looking place,

with a wide green, surrounding that a number of old-fashioned brick and timber houses, and dominating all a well-proportioned church. In the post-office there were some newspapers for sale—weekly newspapers; but we had lost interest in the great and busy world we had forsaken; and these heavy compilations of paragraphs did not seem attractive. When we got leisurely back to the boat again we discovered that Captain Columbus had taken advantage of our absence to bait the horse, so that we were enabled to resume our voyage forthwith.

It was about a mile after that—and we were now on the Worcester and Birmingham Canal—that we came in sight of the entrance to West Hill Tunnel, and likewise perceived that there were a large number of barges waiting for the steam-launch to return and take them through. As yet there was no line of procession formed; and as we could discover no master of ceremonies, we took up a modest position by the bank opposite the tow-path, and awaited instructions. Our neighbours paid us little heed; as it happened, there was a contest of wits going on; and as the rival jesters were far apart, and had to bawl out their merry quips, they won loud

and general laughter by their efforts. With our strictest attention, however, we could make nothing of these recondite japes. We wanted some interpreter, as in the homiletic *Gesta Romanorum*, to come in with "*Carissimi*" and an explanation. Meanwhile, at Queen Tita's request, Murdoch had lit the candles in the saloon; but this was to be merely an experiment; for one knew not whether the light might not subsequently prove to be a distraction to the steersman responsible for the safety of these people.

"Look there!" cries Peggy. "Look at that pony! Did you ever see anything more picturesque in Italy?"

And a picturesque little animal it was—a piebald black and white; with cream-coloured ear-coverings and crimson tassels; brass ornaments on its forehead; blue and white ribbons at the side of its head; a bunch of hay hanging from its collar; a nose-tin of burnished copper suspended from its neck. Quite a gay little creature it was; and a marked feature in the slow procession of animals that now left the side of the canal to go forward and await us at the other end of the tunnel.

Then appeared a black and grimy little steam-launch; there was an interview with

Columbus and a production of papers; we were furnished with a lamp to be fixed at the bow; and thereupon the burly little steamer proceeded to head the long line. How that line was formed it was hard to say; but it was clear we were to be at the tail-end of it; and, indeed, as barge after barge moved away, we had no more than time to throw a rope to the last of them and get attached. The huge black snake before us was disappearing into the bowels of the earth with a marvellous rapidity; one had to steer as straight as one could for the small and narrow arch at the base of that mighty mass of masonry; the semicircular opening seemed to close around us; and the next moment we were in darkness. This sudden plunge into the unknown was sufficiently startling; for now there was no welcome star of light far away ahead, while the red glow in the saloon told us nothing of our whereabouts or our proper course. We only knew there was a wall around us, for we grated along this side, and then banged against that; and, altogether, the situation was unpleasant. But matters mended a little. Whether the smoke from the launch had lessened or not, one could at length make out, at a considerable distance along, two dull

spots of orange, doubtless two lamps; and these at least gave some indication of our course, and some guidance for steering. The worst of it was that this light boat at the end of these heavy barges would not properly answer her helm; the "swing" they gave her was too powerful; and all that could be done was for Columbus and Murdoch at the bow, and the Colonel astern, to keep shoving with hands or feet, as occasion offered, to prevent the boat from tearing herself to pieces against the almost invisible wall. Not a word was spoken, for no one knew what might happen the next second; the only certain thing was that, whatever might befall, we were powerless to avert it. In the previous tunnel, while we were being "legged" through, if we had come to a difficulty we should have stopped to consider; now we were being dragged irresistibly along, by a force with which we had no possible communication.

"I say," at length remarks Miss Peggy, who is standing on the steering thwart, and holding on to the iron rod, "do you see those two small lights far away along there?"

"I should hope so. They're all I've got to go by."

"Well, but if you take your eyes off them

for a moment, you'll see other two lights in the dark—of a curious pale purple."

"I suppose you know what complementary colours are?"

"This is a far more ghostly place than the other—I wish we were well out of it," she says.

Suddenly, into the hollow-sounding vault, there springs a shrill, high, plaintive note; and we find that one of the younger bargemen has begun to relieve the tedium of this mediterranean passage by a pathetic ballad. So silent is the tunnel—for there is only a dull throbbing far away of the engine of the steam-launch—that every word can be distinctly heard; and by guessing here and there at peculiarities of pronunciation, one can make out easily enough the main current of these stories. For it is not one, but many pieces, that this Brummagem Orpheus, descended into the deeps of the earth, has in his repertory; and generally they are found to deal with the trials, and experiences, and sorrows of a young man:—

"My father died a drunkard,
And I was left alone,
To fight the world all by myself,
With ne'er a house or home."

Or again the high, shrill, nasal voice would tell how this hapless young man was entrapped into going to sea :—

> *"The captain said as I was bound*
> *To go for seven years."*

There was very little love-making in these ditties ; indeed, in the only one that partly touched on this topic there was a most ungallant reference to the maids of merry England. It ran somewhat in this fashion :—

It was a lass of Coventry,
As fair as fair could be ;
And on a Sunday evening,
She walked along o' me ;
I asked her then, she gave consent,
She was as good as gold ;
How little did I ever think
That she should grow so cold !

'Now, Jane, fulfil your promise,
The promise you gave me,
Or I will turn a sailor,
And sail away to sea ;'
'O Tom,' she said, a-crying,
'My heart will burst in two,
For I love Jim the carpenter
As once I did love you.'

Now all you gay young mariners
That sail upon the main,
I pray you keep yourselves abroad,
And ne'er come home again ;

"From port to port you'll meet with girls
That are both kind and free;
But the girls of this old England
They'll ne'er get hold o' me."

The door of the saloon is opened, and a dark, small figure appears against the dull glow.

"Peggy," says Queen Tita (who has been at the forward window, vainly peering out into the blackness), "isn't this dreadful? I can see no sign of anything; and the boat will be smashed to bits before we get out. Can *you* see anything?"

"Nothing but the two small lights in the distance—two lamps, I suppose. I'm afraid we're not near the end yet."

"But the tunnel is only a mile and a half long: even with this crawling we should be through in three quarters of an hour at the most."

"I'm afraid we haven't been in the tunnel anything like that," says Miss Peggy; and she is right.

"May I come up beside you?"

"Oh, no, please don't!" the girl says at once. "I can't see where the board is: you might slip. I dare not move hand or foot."

"I hope it will be my last experience of the kind," the other says, with some decision,

and she goes back into the saloon, to stare anxiously through the window-pane.

And still our unknown friend with the high and nasal voice pours out his artless narratives, one after the other. When he ceases, there is a dead silence; no one attempts to interfere or help; perhaps this performance of his is acknowledged and has brought him fame among the bargemen of the west. Nor does he ever relapse into the comic vein. Life has been serious for these young men of whom he sings. Hard work, poor wages, tyrannical masters, and the temptations of drink in seaport towns have wrought them many woes. And yet they do not complain over much; it is the hand of fate that has been against them; they relate their experiences as a warning or as a consolation to others in similar plight. Indeed, we were highly pleased with these simple ditties—thinking, as we may have done, of the ghastly facetiousness, the cynicism, the knowingness that delight the gin-sodden London music-haller.

And so we fought our way through this echoing and interminable cavern, striving to steer a middle passage between those walls that seemed to tear at the side of the boat as with demon claws; and ever we were looking for-

ward for the small spot of light that would tell us of the near-coming of the outer world. It was Miss Peggy who caught sight of it first.

"There it is!—look!" she cried.

Then one could make out—apparently at a great distance away—a sort of miniature bull's-eye, of a dullish hue, that disappeared now and again behind clouds of smoke; but ever, as we glided or grated along, it was growing larger and larger; and the saffron hue that it showed was becoming more and more strangely luminous, so that the two lamps we had been following for so long had become invisible. And now we can make out an archway filled with a confused yellow light; the black barges are sailing towards it and through it; sometimes a bronze-hued smoke obscures the opening, and again there is a golden glare; finally—but with eyes dazed with the sudden splendour of colour—we sail out into the placid beauty of this bit of Worcestershire scenery—the green wooded banks, the brown water, and the overhanging trees all warm in the light of the afternoon sky; and the candles, ineffectual and unheeded, still burning in the now forsaken saloon.

"Well," says Queen Tita, with a sigh of

relief, "now that we have come safely through, I'm glad we have done it."

Miss Peggy comports herself more bravely.

"I'd do it again to-morrow!" she says.

"Then you shall," one answers her.

"What do you mean?" she says—just a little taken aback.

"To-morrow we have two more tunnels to go through."

"Oh, indeed," she says. "But perhaps they are the simpler ones, where we can push the boat through by ourselves?"

"Certainly not; we shall have to be towed through by a steamer."

"Peggy," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit maliciously, "'when I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married.'"

"Come on, a hundred tunnels!" says Miss Peggy, laughing. "Do you think I am afraid of them? But I confess that it is a good deal nicer to be out here in the warm air."

That, however, was not precisely the question that was concerning the more responsible members of this travelling party. On overhauling the Nameless Barge with such carefulness as was possible, we found that apparently she had sustained no serious damage during

her subterranean voyage, although she bore abundant marks of ill-usage that did not improve her appearance. On raising the stern-sheets — which was the readiest way of ascertaining what water was in her—it was discovered that there had been no unusual leakage ; so that we hoped she had suffered nothing but what could be put right by a little mending and scrubbing, and a coat of paint. We were therefore free to continue our voyage in peace.

And peaceful indeed, and very beautiful, was that afternoon's sail. In this neighbourhood the canal winds along a high embankment, formed on the side of a hill ; and there were wide views over the far-stretching and undulating landscape—the deep valleys near us inclosed by distant cultivated slopes, here and there crowned by a bit of wood. The evening was mellow and golden ; we had allowed the barges to get away ahead of us, so that we were once more by ourselves ; after the rough-and-tumble work of the day, we were glad to resume our quiet gliding through the silent and shining country. When it became a question of halting for the night, it mattered little to us where we moored ; we were once more quite alone. Captain Columbus hinted

that there was a small place not far off, called Alvechurch, where he could get stabling and also accommodation for himself and the Horse-Marine; and so we assented; and chose out a part of the bank where there were some bushes; and soon the Nameless Barge was again at rest.

After dinner that evening Mrs. Threepenny-bit must needs have Peggy bring out her banjo, which had remained in its case since our leaving Stratford-on-Avon. Miss Peggy seemed a little loth. When Colonel Cameron joined in the request, that did not improve matters much—rather the contrary, as it appeared to us. And yet she was persuaded in the end; and she went and got the banjo; and then, with a timidity we had never seen her exhibit (this was not like our Peggy at all!), she began and sang the old familiar and simple "Mary Blane"; and very well she sang it, too—notwithstanding her shyness—with her rich contralto voice. Colonel Cameron seemed a little surprised. He had not heard our Peggy sing before. And certainly there was something in the quality of her singing a little finer than the shrill and nasal tones that had rung along the hollow-sounding underworld

through which we had passed; though even now that experience seemed so recent that we could almost hear the high and plaintive drawl—

Now all you gay young mariners
That sail upon the main,
I pray you keep yourselves abroad,
And ne'er come home again;
From port to port you'll meet with girls
That are both kind and free;
But the girls of this old England
They'll ne'er get hold o' me.

That was interesting in its way; and indeed we were grateful to the unknown young Orpheus for enlivening our black voyage; but we preferred to be among the silences once more; entirely by ourselves in this floating little home; with the cheerful lamps lit, and cigars and things; and with Peggy — her voice deep-throated as a nightingale's—to lend another charm to the last lingering half-hours together, ere we parted for the night.

CHAPTER VI.

"But who the melodies of morn can tell?
The wild brook babbling down the mountain-side;
The lowing herd; the sheepfold's simple bell;
The pipe of early shepherd dim descried
In the lone valley; echoing far and wide
The clamorous horn along the cliffs above;
The hollow murmur of the ocean-tide;
The hum of bees, the linnet's lay of love,
And the full choir that wakes the universal grove."

This is a Sunday morning, still and beautiful, the sunlight lying warmly over the wide Worcestershire landscape, with its far-stretching valleys and copse-crowned hills, its smiling farms, and mansions half-hidden among woods. The perfect silence is hardly lessened, rather it seems heightened, by the universal singing of the birds—a multitudinous and joyous din that almost drowns the velvet-soft note of the cuckoo. If Warwickshire chiefly struck us by its sylvan luxuriance, surely we must give

pre-eminence to this county of Worcester in the matter of bird-music; and well it fits with the pleasant morning, and the peaceful country-side, and the prevailing stillness, which, as far as we can hear, is not as yet broken by any sound of a church-bell. And then, as we are listening, there comes a human voice into this domain—a startling thing, for we have grown accustomed to be the sole possessors of these solitudes—and this is a stranger's voice we hear in the distance, singing in a high, and wavering, and plaintive key. Then we behold the first of a long string of barges. The music draws nearer. We can make out phrases—*In the sweet. . . . boi and boi. . . . we shall meet on that beautiful shore. . . . In the sweet. . . . boi and boi. . . . we shall meet on that beautiful shore.* But as the first of the barges comes along, the young man who is singing and steering at the same time becomes mute; he glances with a veiled wonder at this nondescript boat moored in among the bushes; and then he is carried on. The people in the other barges also stare a little, in silence. They are very quiet this morning. Perhaps they have been up at an early hour. Or perhaps their somnolent way of life has sunk

into their souls. They regard us with a blank look as they pass, and then return to their monotonous task of watching the prow of their boat, with their hand or arm on the tiller.

"Good morning!" says Miss Peggy, coming out into the white light with her cheeks fresh-tinted as the rose, and her speedwell-blue eyes shining. "This *is* a surprise! I made sure it was raining hard—there was such a pattering on the roof——"

"And didn't you know what the pattering was?"

"Since it wasn't rain, I suppose it was rats."

"Not at all. It was birds. They were hopping about in search of crumbs among all that rubbish that we scraped off in the tunnel. Murdoch must get a brush and sweep the roof; it isn't like him to be so neglectful."

"I know why," she says. "He can hardly take his eyes off Colonel Cameron; and he listens to no one else. I suppose Colonel Cameron is a great hero in Murdoch's eyes?"

"Well, you see, the Highlanders have a strong regard for these old families, although the clans and clanship have long been abolished. There isn't much that a Highlander wouldn't do for Lochiel, or Cluny, or

Lord Lovat, or some of those. And then, when any representative of these well-known families distinguishes himself, of course the Highlanders are very proud of him, and don't make too little of his exploits. At the same time, you must remember that Ewen Cameron's name is known—slightly—to other people besides the Highlanders."

"I think he is almost too gentle for a soldier, don't you?" she says. "No; I won't say that; for I like him so much; and I'm not the least bit afraid of him now. Yes, I like him very much indeed; and that's honest now; and I don't see how anyone can help liking him. He is so considerate. Do you notice how he never forgets to say something to Murdoch in Gaelic when they meet for the first time in the morning? It is a little thing; but I think it is very nice of him. I consider him to be just a type of what a perfect gentleman should be in manners—I mean, he is nearer my idea of that than anyone I have ever met. He is so natural; and so very kind to you without making any pretence about it; and never anything is done for display; and then he never worries you with attentions; perhaps it's rather the other way—perhaps he is a little stand-offish; but then,

you know he has lived so long among the English and their airs of indifference. Well, I like even that in his manner. There is a kind of proud simplicity about him, that is so different from—well, from the kind of mock gallantry that young men think so fine. Oh, I wish girls could talk!"

"Can't they?"

"I wish they were allowed to speak their minds—some people would be surprised! Why, they'll come to you—a perfect stranger—and they'll profess to be so complaisant, and give themselves such fascinating airs, and pretend to be charmed, too, by your superior accomplishments; and they think you're such a fool as not to see through it all! And of course a girl can't say 'Oh, go away and don't make an ass of yourself!'"

"It certainly would not be usual for a well brought-up young lady to speak in that way."

"It's only their vanity!" continues Miss Peggy, with contemptuous vehemence. "And what they say to you they say to the next, and to the next dozen, and to the next hundred; and they think that girls are so simple as not to know. Well, we're simple enough, but we've ceased to be infants, I suppose——"

How far her indignation might have carried her, it is impossible to guess; but at this moment the door was again opened, and out came a tall figure with another "Good-morning!" while Miss Peggy was instantly struck silent, and that with some obvious embarrassment. She even flushed slightly; and to cover her not quite intelligible confusion one had to say quickly—

"Here is Miss Rosslyn, Cameron, who wants to know all about the Highland clans, and the clansmen, and their relations to the chiefs. And about the '45 rising, too; she is to be made a partisan of Prince Charlie; she must be turned into a Jacobite if there's going to be any peace and quietude on board this boat. And who can do that better than yourself?"

"Oh, no," he said, with a smile, "no, no, no; all that is past and gone now. Chiefs and clansmen are alike loyal now-a-days; we are the Queen's 'loyal Highlanders,' and proud to wear the title."

"Yes, but don't you understand," one says to him, "how interesting it must be to an ingenuous young student from America—where all the institutions and habits and customs are comparatively new—to hear of this

very old-world state of society; yes, and to hear of it from one related to the people who were 'out' in the '45?"

"Well, when you think of it," says Inverfask (for Miss Peggy has not a word to say for herself, having been in some mysterious kind of way "caught"), "it does seem strange that the clan system was actually in existence in the last century, and within a couple of days' ride—or a single day's ride, you might almost say—from the city of Edinburgh. And very little the good people of Edinburgh knew about the Highlanders and their ways. I suppose you never heard the story of what happened to Lord Kilmarnock at Falkirk—it is in Chambers' 'History of the Rebellion'—and you should get that book, Miss Rosslyn, if you are at all curious to know about that time—Lord Kilmarnock had raised a troop of horse for the Prince, and had been with him all through the expedition into England, and all through the retreat, and so must have got some knowledge of the clansmen and their customs. But what happened at Falkirk no doubt puzzled him. The day after the battle, the Prince and he were looking down from the window of a house in the town, and to their surprise they saw a soldier coming along

in the English uniform, and wearing a black cockade in his hat—— "

"Peggy," interposes a small person, who has insinuated herself into this group after a brief "Good-morning" all round, "of course you know that the white cockade was the Stuart badge:

"'There grows a bonnie brier-bush in our kail-yard,
And white are the blossoms o't in our kail-yard.'"

"Their first impression," our Colonel resumes, "was that this straggler might perhaps be some hare-brained adventurer who had come along intending to shoot at the Prince; however, Lord Kilmarnock immediately went down-stairs and into the street, went up to the man, struck off his hat, and put his foot on the black cockade. The next moment one of the Highlanders standing by had rushed on Lord Kilmarnock and shoved him away; Kilmarnock instantly pulled out his pistol and presented it at his assailant; the Highlander drew his dirk; and goodness only knows what would have happened if a number of the Highlander's companions had not interposed on behalf of their comrade and driven Lord Kilmarnock off. And what was it all about? Why, the man with the black cockade was a Cameron who had been in an

English regiment, and who, of course, deserted to join the standard of his chief as soon as he got the chance; and, being a Cameron, the other Camerons standing around would not have him interfered with by anyone, whatever his rank. This was a matter for the clan and the chief of the clan with which no outsider could intermeddle. 'No one in the Prince's army,' they said, 'had the right to take the cockade out of the man's hat except Lochiel himself.' And if the Edinburgh and Glasgow people," Inverfask continued (seeing that Miss Peggy was an attentive listener), "were afraid of those wild folk from the hills, you may imagine what the English villagers thought of them. That must have been an odd experience for Lochiel—the 'Gentle Lochiel' they called him in the north—when he went into the lodgings assigned him—somewhere in England it was—and found his landlady on her knees before him, entreating him to take her life, but spare her two little children. I suppose he did not look much of an ogre; for when he told her he did not mean to harm anyone, she answered that it was the general belief that the Highlanders made small children a common article of food. Then, when he still further reassured her, she called aloud,

'Come out, children, the gentleman will not eat you'; and the trembling creatures came out of a clothes-press where they had been hidden. Indeed, the bulk of those Highlanders must have looked like savages to the English people, accustomed to their trim soldiers. Their very weapons were the weapons of savages——"

Here Murdoch's bell tinkled, and we had all to troop in to the little breakfast-table in the saloon; but now that Queen Tita had found Colonel Cameron willing to improve and inform the mind of her young American friend, she was not going to let him abandon the task.

"I'm afraid, Sir Ewen," she said, "you'll have to give Peggy a good deal of information; she has never been through the hall at Inverfask, you know."

"Well," he said, "isn't it odd to think that only in the last century our own countrymen were going into battle with a target made of wood and bull's-hide, and studded with brass nails, on their left arm to protect them? It is hardly to be wondered at that the English were bewildered by the manner of fighting of those wild Highlanders. This was what they did—if Miss Rosslyn cares to know. The

front rank was composed almost entirely of gentlemen—connected by blood with the chief, that is—and they were armed with the leather target, a musket, a claymore, pistols, and dirk; the rear rank had any kind of weapon they could lay their hand on—sometimes a scythe or a sickle attached to a pole. When the line charged, the Highlanders rushed forward until they were quite at close quarters; fired their muskets and threw them away; drew their claymores and again rushed forward, receiving the bayonets of the enemy on their targets, that almost entirely covered them; then they twisted aside the bayonet-point fixed in the target, and found the helpless English soldier at their mercy. The fury of this first onslaught is said on all hands to have been incredible: why, at Culloden, there was one of the Mackintoshes—John Mor Macgilvray, I think was his name—hewed his way into the English lines a gun-shot past the cannons, and he had a dozen men lying killed around him before they could get him dispatched. Well, that was not the reason that made Macdonald of Keppoch keep up a hopeless struggle, when everything was lost. You remember, the Macdonalds were mortally offended because at Culloden they were given

the left of the line, whereas they had always fought on the right; the consequence was, they refused to move; they stood the enemy's fire with the greatest coolness and courage; but nothing could induce them to charge; and, at last, with the general retreat, they turned also and fled. When Keppoch saw that he cried aloud, 'My God, have the children of my tribe forsaken me?'—doesn't it sound like something you have read of in the Old Testament?—and he rushed forward, alone, to certain death. He fell wounded; and even then one of his followers tried to get him to leave the field; but no; he went forward again; received another shot, and fell dead. And well it was," continued Inverfask, in a lower voice, and with a darker light in his eye, "that he fell *dead*. He might have lain on the field that night, and the next day, too, until it pleased the Butcher to send out his platoons of musketry in order to put the wounded out of their pain. I believe that was his phrase."

Then he seemed to reflect that this was rather a gloomy subject for a bright and cheerful Sunday morning in Worcestershire; and he began to talk to his hostess about the use of these old claymores and cavalry pistols

and dirks in the way of decoration, and to warn her against the sham targets manufactured—dints and all—in Edinburgh for the embellishment of hotel smoking-rooms and the halls of rich Glasgow merchants.

"But, Colonel Cameron," said Miss Peggy, harking back, "are the Highlanders of the present day—are your Highland soldiers—anything like those clansmen who followed Charles Edward into England?"

"Well," he said, with a smile, "you wouldn't find much outward likeness between a Highland regiment of to-day and the men who came down from the hills with Clanranald and Glengarry and the rest of them. But our present Highlanders have inherited a good many of their qualities—for you don't change the instincts of a race in a century and a half. As all the world knows, they are brave—what the Highland regiments have done in the British army would be a long story to tell; they are immensely proud of their nationality; they are warmly devoted to such officers as they like; and they need to be humoured a little. Colin Campbell never did a more astute thing in his life than when he announced to the Forty-Second, the Ninety-Third, and the Seventy-Ninth—just

after they had won the heights of Alma—that he meant to ask the Commander-in-Chief for permission to wear the Highland bonnet during the rest of the campaign. It was an adroit compliment; he himself wrote home how pleased the men were. And I have no doubt that the one occasional defect of the Highland soldier—his impetuosity—his anxiety to come to close quarters and carry everything with a rush—is inherited from the clansmen. You remember how Sir Colin had to roar at the Ninety-Third when they went forward at Balaclava—'Ninety-Third, Ninety-Third, damn all that eagerness!' Well, he had no reason to complain of their want of steadiness when they were at length formed in position: the 'thin red line,' and how it withstood the charge of the Russian cavalry, and broke them, and hurled them back, will not be forgotten soon, I think. Indeed, Sir Colin must have had a fair amount of confidence in his Highlanders when he did not form them into square to receive that tremendous charge; they were not even in fours; they were only two deep; and everyone, Dr. Ansell wrote at the time, stopped, breathless, to watch the 'bursting of the wave upon the line of Gaelic rock.' I'm afraid the clansmen could not

have withstood a charge like that," continues Colonel Cameron—addressing himself mainly to the young American lady, who, strangely enough, seems a hundred times more interested in hearing of these deeds of blood and battle than in listening to Jack Duncombe's literary disquisitions and his cursing of the critics. "No: the first rush was everything with them. Prestonpans—where they first met the English, as you know—was the work of a few minutes, so headlong was their assault. Lochiel told his followers to strike at the noses of the horses, so as to produce confusion in the English ranks; but they never got the chance; the dragoons bolted straight away."

"'They a' ran awa', ran awa', frae the hundred pipers and a' and a'!'" says our twopenny-halfpenny Jacobite at the head of the table; and at the same moment Captain Columbus makes his appearance without; and presently Murdoch is standing at the door of the saloon, awaiting orders.

Now, this being Sunday, Queen Tita would rather have given our gay young mariners and their diligent horse a rest; but, as appeared from our captain's report, there were ominous rumours abroad among the canal-folk

of intended repairs somewhere or other; and he himself was distinctly of opinion that we should at least push forward and get through the two tunnels. So we assented to that; poled the boat across to the tow-path; had the line affixed to the harness; and were once more gliding along.

But when we came to the first of the tunnels, we found we had just missed the steam-launch, which had disappeared with its long convoy into that black hole in the earth; and as there was now a considerable time for us to wait, we all got ashore, and proceeded to explore the neighbouring wood, which is known as Shortwood Dingle. And a very picturesque wood this turned out to be—here and there showing wide clearances, where the trees had been felled, here and there dipping down into a deep hollow, where one could hardly get through the tangled bushes. And we had not been strolling very far when we discovered that we had come into the land of which the poets fable. The wild-flowers were all wrong. We had noticed in the Warwickshire woods a kind of tendency on the part of Nature to jumble up the times and seasons; but that was nothing to the anachronisms we encountered here. We remem-

bered charges we had brought against Milton, Shakespeare, Burns (Burns, curiously enough, is never wrong in his poetry—it is when he is writing inflated prose that he trips up), and others; and we were filled with remorse of conscience. For in these open spaces between the felled stumps, and in the glades between the bushes, and down in the moist dells, amid all the profusion of bloom, the customary dates of the coming and going of the earlier wild-flowers of the year seemed to have been quite disregarded. Here, for example, were scattered patches of the red campion (*Lychnis diurna*), which, properly speaking, is a June and July flower. There, between the trees, were sheets of the wild hyacinth, making a blue as of the sky overhead. Everywhere, among the dank grass, were pale yellow clusters of primroses; and the primrose is usually held to be an April visitant (we were now well on in May), though the present writer has occasionally found an odd specimen as late as August. However, the matter of times and seasons bothered us little; here was a rare abundance of blossoms: the white stars of the stitchwort (*Stellaria Holostea*); the tender-hued yellow dead-nettle; the darker coloured cowslip; the purple self-heal; the modest violet

among its smooth, dark leaves; the bright little flower of the wild strawberry, and many another old familiar friend. For the rest, we found this Shortwood Dingle rather a dampish place; but even in the deeper hollows the crude greens of the early summer were tempered by the russets and browns of the fallen oak-leaves; and the sunlight striking down here and there spread a soft radiance around.

Miss Peggy was busy. She said the sconces in the saloon had never been properly decorated. Now she would have one entirely surrounded with cowslips, another with wild hyacinths, another with yellow dead-nettle, the fourth with red campion, while an indiscriminate mass of blossoms might adorn the table. Mrs. Threepenny-bit wanted to know (as if anybody could tell her) why Shakespeare, among all his references to wild-flowers, never mentions the hyacinth or blue-bell, though it must be much more common in these parts (this was her contention) than the "azure hare-bell" that was to strew the grave of Imogen. Colonel Cameron, when he was not talking to the women, was chiefly on the outlook for pheasants—of which we saw none. And so we wandered along through this picturesque dingle, and up to a height from which there

is a wide view over the adjacent country, and eventually back to the canal, where there were now several boats besides our own awaiting the arrival of the steam-launch.

When that far from gay vessel arrived, we were all waterproofed and ready for the ordeal —all except Mrs. Threepenny-bit, who preferred to sit by herself in the saloon, awaiting events, and consoling herself with the reflection that these two Tardebigg tunnels were shorter than the West Hill one. Shorter we found them; but also much darker—indeed, absolutely dark; for the bargemen did not seem to consider it necessary to light their lamps on this occasion. Accordingly, one had to steer by touch—that is to say, by the scraping of the boat on one or the other side of the tunnel; and as the second of these subterranean ways is hewn out of solid rock, the poor Nameless Barge suffered many a rude knock in her laborious passage. But Miss Peggy had grown quite fearless now. She begged to be allowed to steer—a request that was instantly and distinctly refused; for we did not want to be drowned like rats in a drain. She even, in a quite unconcerned way (to judge by her tone, for one could not get even a glimmering outline of her) returned

to the subject of the Highland regiments and the surviving traces of clanship and comradeship—as if one could listen to the idle chatter of this long-limbed school-girl while piloting a valuable argosy through unknown deeps. So we scraped and tore our way along first the one tunnel, and then—with an interval of smooth sailing in the white day—through its rock-hewn successor; until, ahead of us in the dark, there grew up and waxed brighter and brighter a sort of fuliginous, confused, opalescent glare; then finally we plunged into that bewildering glory—bronze-hued or saffron-hued it appeared as we approached it—and suddenly emerged into a sunlit greenness of foliage and the quietude of the outer world.

"How many more of these tunnels shall we have to go through?" asks Queen Tita; and it would seem that the more she sees of them the less she likes them.

"Not another one; that is the last. The next possible danger we have to face is going down the Severn; and I dare say we shall be able to manage somehow. 'We'll warsle through.'"

"Oh, I don't mind what it is—so long as there is daylight," she says; and then she

adds—looking back to the low archway of the tunnel—"but I confess I am not anxious for any more experiences of *that* kind."

"But just think of the story you will have to tell when you go back to London!" says Miss Peggy, putting her arm round her friend's neck for a moment, as she is passing along to her cabin, to get the sand and wet out of her pretty brown hair.

This was a strange sort of afternoon. We were now at a very considerable elevation, and could overlook a vast extent of country stretching away on both sides of us; but there was a pale mist lying over the land, with which the faint sunlight was ineffectually struggling; and here and there, indeed, the far wooded heights seemed to rise out of a sea of white fog. The map informed us of the hilly nature of the neighbourhood—Shadow Hill, Turret Hill, Breakneck Hill, Hill-top, and so on; but all that we could make out was a ghostly kind of landscape looming through the grey vapour; sometimes catching a pale yellow tone from a shaft of sunlight, sometimes showing darker ridges of trees, high in air, rising out of the formless chaos in the valleys beneath. It was grievous that we should thus be cheated out of the wide

prospect; but in any case we had soon to descend from our lofty position; we came to a series of no fewer than six-and-thirty locks; and working our way laboriously down through these, we found ourselves close to Stoke Prior. It only remains to be noted that, just as we reached the foot of that long flight of steps and stairs, Mrs. Threepenny-bit and Miss Peggy, who happened to be in the saloon together, made a remarkable discovery. They discovered that the glass had risen very considerably. This was such joyous news that they must needs come rushing forth to proclaim it. And, apparently, it gave them so much pleasure that it was not worth while informing the innocent young things that the aneroid had risen, not to announce any change in the weather, but simply because we had descended from the heights to the plain.

It was a social afternoon, too. We had an abundance of visitors. The people belonging to the chemical works near Stoke had come out for their Sunday evening stroll—they and their families—and the banks of the canal seemed to be their favourite promenade. We were so fortunate as to be able to afford them quite a novel excitement and cause of wonder; and the curiosity with which they examined

the boat, and the inmates of the boat, and tried to get glimpses of the interior of the saloon, was of the most open and simple and ingenuous kind.

"They look as if they would like very much to be invited on board," Queen Tita said.

"If we stop anywhere, I shall try to get some of the children on board," Inverfask made answer. "It will be a raree-show for them to remember for years."

And he was as good as his word—or tried to be. A bridge stopped us for a minute or two; and there happened to be a number of small folk on the bank, both boys and girls. But they were not to be enticed. He wheedled and coaxed—Miss Peggy helping him—without avail; either they stared with stolid eyes or grinned and hung back. On the other hand, two bland and healthy-cheeked young rustics, of about eighteen or twenty, informed us that they had to tramp that night all the way to Worcester; and were so kind as to offer us their society for as far as we might be going. We were obliged to decline that amiable proposal. And so—gradually leaving behind us the last twos and threes of that vagrant population—we sailed

smoothly on by Summer Hill, and Hadsor, and Dunhamstead, and Oddingley; while the grey mists around us deepened, and the dusk came over the voiceless land.

We were at length forced to call a halt, and ask Captain Columbus if he had any idea where he was going to put up for the night. He said he had not. On consulting the map, we found the only place with a name in this neighbourhood was called Tibberton; and we advised him and the horse-marine to go in quest of it, before it became quite dark. Accordingly, off they went, leaving us to our solitude; and we were not sorry when all the lamps and candles were lit in the saloon, shutting out those pale swathes of mist, and shining cheerfully on the white cloth of the dinner-table, now gay with the Shortwood Dingle flowers.

And then it was—at dinner—that Queen Tita skilfully drew our Colonel on to talk about Inverfask House, and the trophies in the hall there, and 1745, and kindred matters; and this he did freely enough; for these were not his own exploits or experiences he was asked to speak about; and he could not but see that the young American lady was very much interested.

"And naturally it is interesting to you," he said to her, "for America has never come through any such phase of civilisation; and it is indeed a survival of a state of society unknown anywhere else in Europe. That is why I think we ought to have some great historical picture to preserve its appearance for us. Perhaps there is some such thing; I don't know; I have been so much abroad that I am not familiar with the public galleries; but there ought to be such a picture—in Edinburgh, for example. I don't mean mere incidents in the Jacobite rebellions; but a general picture of the Highland Army—say, as it appeared on the morning of the Battle of Prestonpans. Don't you think it would be very striking? I mean just before the battle began, when the sun rolled away the mist, showing the Highland lines—the gentlemen in the front rank, with targets and claymores and dirks; about the middle of the line, the chief of the clan and his immediate kinsmen; the rear rank made up of his half-armed followers—unkempt, wild-haired, wiry-looking men from the hills, many of them bare-legged and bare-footed from the long marching. It was just before the charge that the whole mass of them removed their bonnets, and offered up a

short prayer: wouldn't that make a striking scene for a painter?"

"And who led the charge, Peggy? And who first sent the English Dragoons flying? It was the clan Cameron!" interposed Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with a kind of triumph; and a very pretty speech it was—for an Englishwoman to make.

"I wonder," continued our Colonel, "if anyone has ever painted the meeting of Prince Charlie with the Seven Men of Glenmorriston—that is a very picturesque incident, now!"

"Who were they?" Miss Peggy asked at once.

"Well, if you are at all interested in the story of the Prince's wanderings—and it *is* an interesting story—I hope you will allow me to send you the *Journal of the Miraculous Escape of the Young Chevalier*," said he. "It has been reprinted; I will send you a copy of the little book——"

"Oh, thank you very much," said she dutifully. "But who were the men you spoke of?"

"Sometimes," said this most amiable of historians, to his intensely interested audience of two—two crazy women, that is to say—"sometimes they are described as noted

thieves and robbers, who lived in a cave in the mountains, subsisting on such plunder as they could get; but I believe the truth is they were simply a small band of men who had been in the Prince's army and who had been grievously ill-treated by the English—despoiled of everything they possessed—and had retired to these wilds, swearing an oath to be revenged on the Government troops and all their allies. However that may be, starvation compelled the Prince to throw himself on the mercy of these outlaws. He and his attendants had been wandering among the hills for forty-eight hours without food of any kind; they had no means of communicating with Lochiel or any of the others who were also skulking in the mountains; and as a last resource, Glenaladale—or his brother, I forget which—advised that they should seek out those men in the cave. That must have been a striking incident, don't you think, when the Prince, all ragged and emaciated with his sufferings, was brought into the den in the rocks, where those half-savage fellows—who couldn't talk a word of English—had secreted themselves. Glenaladale introduced the Prince to them as young Clanranald; but they recognised him at once; and constituted themselves his body-

guard, swearing an oath, in Gaelic, to be faithful to him——"

"And mind you, Peggy," Queen Tita again interposes (so wild is she about these Highland folk), "mind you, Peggy, any one of those poor wretches could at any moment, and without any danger or trouble, have gone to the nearest military station and claimed £30,000 for telling where the Prince was."

"Chambers says," continues Colonel Cameron—and of course it is chiefly for Miss Peggy's edification that he is recalling these old stories —"that those poor fellows kept their oath so well that they never mentioned the Prince's name until a twelvemonth after he had escaped to France. And when he, on first trusting his safety to them, proposed that Glenaladale and himself should also take an oath of fidelity towards them, pledging every one of the party to stand by the others to the last, they said no; they did not require that."

"And yet they say that a Prince who could inspire such heroic devotion was a contemptible person!" the smaller woman exclaimed, with proud lips.

"A contemptible person he was not," said Cameron, gravely. "He had the stuff in him of a capable soldier; and it was a grievous

misfortune he was ever led away by promises from the French Court to attempt an enterprise that cost many a brave man his life and ruined many a family. I suppose claimants for thrones don't take such things into account. Anyway, it would have been a bad day for both England and Scotland if he had succeeded; everyone knows that; and everyone may acknowledge as much and yet admit that Charles Edward was an able and intrepid soldier, a generous and high-spirited companion—even in the worst of his troubles—and a gallant Prince. It is conceded by everyone who came in contact with him—from the chiefs of the clans who ventured their fortunes for him to the poor wretched islanders who perilled their lives for him, and who, years and years after, could never hear his name mentioned without tears rushing into their eyes. That is not the kind of enthusiasm and strong and devoted affection that is awakened by any contemptible person."

Queen Tita seemed very happy all the rest of this evening; and was most effusively kind to Colonel Cameron; and she said that, if Miss Rosslyn should happen to be in the Highlands with us that autumn, she hoped he would allow these two to pay a visit—in his

absence, of course—to Inverfask House, so that Miss Rosslyn should see the hall and its contents. Colonel Cameron answered that to invite anyone to visit a house with the owner of it absent was not what was generally considered a Highland welcome; and, if he only knew about what time these two friends were likely to be in the neighbourhood of Inverfask, it would be hard if he could not find a few days in which to go north to receive them. And Miss Peggy seemed mightily pleased, too —but whether it was at the notion of inspecting Inverfask House, or from some other cause, one could not definitely say.

CHAPTER VII.

"Now he goes on, and sings of fairs and shows,
For still new fairs before his eyes arose.
How pedlars' stalls with glittering toys are laid,
The various fairings of the country maid.
Long silken laces hang upon the twine,
And rows of pins and amber bracelets shine;
How the tight lass knives, combs, and scissors spies,
And looks on thimbles with desiring eyes.
Of lotteries next with tuneful note he told,
Where silver spoons are won, and rings of gold.
The lads and lasses trudge the street along,
And all the fair is crowded in his song."

Next morning our women-folk, though they did not say much, betrayed a quite remarkable eagerness and animation; and we could guess the cause; for we had discovered by the map that we were not more than half-a-dozen miles from Worcester; and no doubt such imagination as Heaven had vouchsafed to these two creatures was already running riot in shops and purchases. And yet it seemed hard to believe that we were in the immediate

neighbourhood of a great and ancient city, whose story told of sieges and fires and massacres, whose streets had resounded with the din of battle and the shouts of victorious hosts. Here, in a kind of dreamlike haze of sunlight, lay quiet fields and meadows; the elms and the hawthorns scarcely stirred a leaf; the only living thing we could see was a pheasant stalking warily through the long grass and eyeing us from time to time—his plumage a blaze amongst the green. Then there were the yellow waters of the canal; a small red bridge in the distance; some further groups of trees; that was all. Not a sound anywhere—even the birds had forsaken us.

"Yes, Miss Peggy," one says to the young lady, when we are all assembled at breakfast, "you must scold Captain Columbus for being late. It is easy to understand why you are anxious to push on. We know what your head is full of at this moment. Shops—gloves—laces—white-rose scent—and things of that kind? No, no. You are a daughter of the Great Republic of the West; and, of course, you are anxious to see the scene of Cromwell's last battle—the 'crowning mercy' that established the Commonwealth—— "

"Peggy," says Mrs. Threepenny-bit, with

innocent eyes, "you haven't been studying English history for some time back—I was quite forgetting——"

"Oh, you hold your tongue!" one continues. "There is only one period of history that is of any importance in your eyes. You see everything from an angle of '45 degrees—1745, I mean; nothing else has any interest for you. But you, Miss Peggy: well, we will show you the cathedral-tower where Charles II. and his Council of War stood and watched Fleetwood building his bridge of boats across the Severn; and we will show you the spot where the Lord-General massed his forces, bringing them along by Stratford-on-Avon and Evesham and Pershore——"

"Was Cromwell ever at Stratford-on-Avon?" she says quickly—as if that were a very curious circumstance.

"Certainly. And we will show you where Fleetwood crossed the Teme, and drove the Scotch, fighting hard, back into the suburbs of the town; and where Cromwell, on the other side of the Severn, had to give way for a time before the final charge."

"Is there a theatre in Worcester?" asks Queen Tita, with shocking irrelevance; the fate of Charles II. is as nothing to her; that

is not the one of the Stuart family who enlists her sympathy.

"There is."

"Then we must take Peggy; she has never been to a provincial theatre in England; and her education can't be completed without that. Then I mean to send a telegram to Bell, just to remind her of old times; how strange it will be to be in Worcester again!"

"And I shall have a whole heap of letters, I know," said Miss Peggy.

"And I am trying to make myself believe that I shall find a box of cigars packed among my things that are coming from Aldershot," observed our Colonel, somewhat wistfully; so that it will be seen there was a plentiful variety of reasons why we should gird a little at Captain Columbus being late.

But when that trustworthy functionary appeared, the delay was easily explained. It turned out that Tibberton had entirely declined to shelter them for the night. No lodging of any kind or description could be found, either there or in the surrounding neighbourhood. So they had come wandering back to the canal; and at last they had met with a most hospitable lock-keeper, who not only offered them the use of his parlour for

the night, but was so kind as to provide them with a modest supper, and, moreover, showed them some kind of shed or another where they could put up the horse. We began to wonder how many centuries ago it was that Tibberton received its name of "the holy town"; and whether it was a resort of pious pilgrims, and a populous and famous place; and why it had so completely and lamentably fallen away from its high fortunes: in the midst of which aimless speculations Captain Columbus had once more attached our motive power, and presently we were smoothly gliding onwards and towards the city of Worcester.

Now it soon became apparent that Colonel Cameron had not forgotten the proposal of the previous evening that Miss Peggy and her friend should pay a visit to Inverfask that autumn; on the contrary, it seemed to have a kind of fascination for him; he returned to it again and again, and always on the assumption that it was an accepted engagement.

"I only wish you could remain there long enough to become thoroughly acquainted with the people," said he to the young lady, as she was considerately helping to steer the boat with her bronze-slippered foot on the tiller. "They may have their faults——"

"But which, Sir Ewen?" interposed Queen Tita, promptly: the notion that her beloved Highland folk could have any faults seemed to startle her.

"Well," said he, rather evasively, "for one thing, I think they are a little apt to tell you what they imagine will please you—rather than be strictly accurate——"

"Indeed, then, I don't find much to object to in an excess of courtesy!" she said, at once. "It is a good deal preferable to boorishness. Most other people wouldn't take the trouble to make things pleasant for you. I'm afraid, Sir Ewen, you will have to find some other fault with my Highlanders!"

"But I was going to tell Miss Rosslyn what was certainly *not* one of their faults," said he, "and that is ingratitude. If a lady lives among them, and is a little kind to them—friendly in her manner, I mean—it is wonderful the affection they will show towards her, and the pride they will take in doing her little services. And then there's another thing: they are the only peasantry I have ever met with who have the knack of saying pretty and nice things; the rudest of them——"

"But, Sir Ewen, there are none of them rude!" Mrs. Threepenny-bit exclaimed.

He laughed.

"They have won your heart, at all events. But what I was going to say is that they have an extraordinary faculty for paying you pretty little compliments—making nice, friendly little speeches——"

"Ah, don't I know that!" she said again.

"And then you must remember that English is a foreign tongue to them; that makes it all the more astonishing; but they are a quick-witted race."

"I think it is their disposition," said she. "If people are well-disposed towards you, and naturally obliging and courteous, the chance always comes, and the phrase too. Look at Murdoch, now. I know he is disappointed with this boat—ashamed of it, most likely. He is lamenting day by day that we haven't a yacht—away there in the West Highlands; but would he say it? He would not. I wish, Sir Ewen, you would ask him some time what he really thinks of England—I mean, when I am not by; for he knows I am an Englishwoman; and he would be sure to say something nice about England out of kindness to me——"

Now just at this moment Murdoch happened to come forth from the saloon. He

had smartened himself up after his morning's work; and he now timidly inquired of the young lady if he was not wanted at the tiller.

"Oh, no, thank you, Murdoch," said she, most pleasantly, "I mean to steer all the way in to Worcester."

And then it was that Colonel Cameron—tempted by the opportunity—and forgetting half his hostess's injunction—asked Murdoch what he thought of England.

"Murdoch, what do you think of this country, now that you have seen so much of it?"

It was a shame. The poor lad glanced nervously at "the mustress," as he was used to call her. For this was a kind of public challenge; his truthfulness was at stake; and yet here was she, an Englishwoman, regarding him. But he was equal to the occasion, after all; for he took refuge in his native tongue.

"*'Si dùthaich bhriagh a th' innte gu dearbh; ach's fheàrr leamsa 'bhi am dùthaich fhéin,*" said he, with averted eyes; and then he withdrew into the interior of the boat—making his way up to the bow, where he remained on guard.

"What did he say?" asked Mrs. Threepenny-bit, as soon as he was out of hearing.

Sir Ewen smiled a little.

"Perhaps you won't think it very complimentary. He said—'*It is a beautiful country, without any doubt; but I would rather be in my own country.*' A little touch of home-sickness; that is all."

"Indeed I don't see what else he could have said," said she, warmly. "If it comes to that—well I wish I were there too!"

"What!" cries Peggy.

"Oh, well, I am quite content with this expedition," she admits, in a half-hearted sort of way. "Yes; I wouldn't have missed it. It has been a very unusual experience; and most interesting at times; I should have been extremely sorry to have missed it. Still—still—well, I won't be so ungrateful as to say anything against it; for we have had many, many delightful days, in the strangest kind of places; and some of the most delightful evenings I ever spent in my life—haven't we, Peggy?—and all I will say is this—that when we get you out among the western islands, far away there in the North, and in a proper sort of yacht, you will find it a little different: that is all I will say."

"In other words," says Miss Peggy, gravely, "'This is a beautiful country, without any doubt; but I would rather be in my own country.'"

And then she turns to Colonel Cameron, and regards him for a swift second in a curious sort of way.

"Sir Ewen, do the people up there look upon you with any of the old clanship feeling —because of the name—and the history of your family?"

"Oh, no, no," he answers; "whatever of that exists now among the Camerons goes naturally to Lochiel. He is chief of the clan. Among the Camerons, whether they are in Argyllshire, or Inverness-shire, or in the backwoods of Canada, Lochiel is everybody; I am nobody."

"There are some I know in the Highlands," puts in Queen Tita, "who would not like to hear that said by anyone else of 'The Coarnel.'"

And in this wise we stole along through the still landscape; making our way under small red bridges, and between woods, and upland slopes, and fertile plains, until we drew near to the ancient city. The approach to Worcester by way of the canal is extremely pleasant; there are suburban villas on sloping banks and surrounded with gardens, which, at

this time of the year, were a mass of blossom. The wharves, when we got to them, were not so captivating, of course; yet we had little reason to complain; for we found the people very good-natured; one firm of wharfingers, in especial—whom we had no opportunity of thanking when we left—being so kind as to furnish us with a snug little berth for the Nameless Barge, and giving us free right of way through their premises. Accordingly, when we had got our things packed, we left them to be brought along by our crew; and started off for the town, and for the Unicorn Hotel.

And what a wild Maelström of a place was this into which we now plunged! The pavements were impassable with crowds of people; our eyes were bewildered with the staring shop windows and signs; our ears distracted with the rattle of innumerable wheels. Our faint recollection of Worcester had been that it was rather an old-fashioned and sleepy town: now we found ourselves suddenly transferred from the remoteness and the silence of these pastoral wanderings into the full roaring blast of nineteenth-century life. The coffee-room at the Unicorn Hotel seemed a large hall. We had almost forgotten what kind of

rooms we wanted. And as for dinner, how could we fix the hour even without Murdoch's adroit advice? We felt ourselves in a measure helpless—come out of another world—stranded upon an unknown shore. And then we became conscious that it was not we who ought to be bewildered, but the landlady, on finding herself confronted by a group of strangers, who had arrived on foot, and without luggage, and yet who apparently had some vague kind of desire to remain.

"I expected moats and battlements—gates, portcullises, drawbridges, and so on," said Miss Peggy, as we sate at lunch (we had at length summoned courage to make known our wants; and found that, although we hailed from the dim regions of Arcady, the trim waitress at the Unicorn sufficiently understood our speech); "but it is quite a modern city."

"It is not a warlike town any longer," her hostess admitted; "it is more of an ecclesiastical town: wait till we take you to the Cathedral, and show you all the quaint old buildings attached to it—with their pretty gardens, and ivied walls, and their look of learned repose. I remember them perfectly; I used to think that the people who lived in those houses must be very well content. And

then, Peggy, as we go there, we must keep a look-out for the old furniture-shops. I was told there were two or three very good ones in Worcester; and one never goes wrong in picking up some knick-knack—a little Sheraton table, or an eighteenth-century tea-tray, or something of the kind—for it is sure to come in handy. If you don't want it yourself, it will do for a wedding-present; and we are always having to look out for a wedding-present: young people will go and make fools of themselves. Hardly any six months go by without our having to go and search for something; and, of course, you can't ignominiously fall back on spoons."

Miss Peggy looked up; and it was as clear as daylight that something exceptionally impertinent was on the tip of her tongue. Then her eyes fell; and she said not a word. That was one good thing that had been secured by the coming of Sir Ewen Cameron; she was very well behaved now; and even, at times, quite respectful to her seniors.

Thereafter we went out into the town again; but now we avoided the crowded thoroughfares—crowded because of some fair or cattle-market, we were told; and made away for the quieter neighbourhood of the Cathedral and

the Severn shore. And as we walked along, it was naturally to be expected that our ingenuous young friend should be willing—if not downright anxious—to hear all about Sexulphus and Wulstan, about Hardicanute, and William Rufus, and Stephen, and other great folk whose names are associated with the history of Worcester. But it was not Worcester at all that Miss Peggy had in her mind. What like was Inverfask House, she was asking. Was it an old building—in the form of a castle, perhaps? Was it close to the sea? Were there any islands near it? Or mountains? How long had it belonged to this branch of the Camerons? Was Colonel Cameron likely to give up his soldiering, and go and live among his own people? How had the estate come to be so heavily mortgaged? Not through his fault, then? But the burdens were being gradually removed? And it was as a soldier, rather than as Cameron of Inverfask, that he was much thought of in the Highlands? Or in both respects, perhaps? And was he much liked by the people?

"I could imagine that he would be," she said, absently answering her own question.

And then an odd thing happened when we were at the Cathedral. We had shown her

the richly-sculptured chancel, the beautiful cloisters, and so forth; and had taken her round to the back of the building, from which she had a wide view over the valley of the Severn, with the pale blue Malvern Hills in the south. She regarded these for a second or two, and then she said—

"Is that like Scotland?"

Queen Tita had just come along.

"Peggy!" she said, indignantly.

"Well?" the girl answered, in absolute innocence.

"That like Scotland! Is a painted tea-tray like Scotland! Wait till you see!"

It seemed hard that the Malvern Hills should have been used so despitefully by an Englishwoman; whereas the Scotch members of the party were probably only too grateful—after their long voyaging through woodland scenery—for that lofty and undulating line of blue along the horizon; nay, one of them was so heartily grateful that there and then he would have been content to call these hills mountains, if it would have pleased anybody. But no; Peggy would see something different from that, she was assured, when she came north. And they now spoke of her visit as a settled and certain thing.

And then again, Scotland, and Inverfask House, and the Young Chevalier all turned up once more that afternoon, and in this fashion. On our way back from the Cathedral, Mrs. Threepenny-bit chanced to espy a bric-à-brac shop which looked very promising indeed; and we were all of us glad enough to escape for a while from the hot glare of the sunlight into the coolness of this place, while she proceeded to search and hunt for possible wedding-presents.

"Most of the English houses I have seen," Miss Peggy was saying to Colonel Cameron—they being merely bystanders and onlookers—"modern English houses, I mean—have seemed to me overcrowded with these things. And then the confusion—the mixing up of different countries and centuries: the drawing-rooms look like museums, without the arrangement of museums. I suppose, now, at Inverfask, there will be greater simplicity; the decoration will belong to one period——"

"I'm afraid, Miss Rosslyn," said he, with a smile, "that Inverfask will have to plead guilty too. There have been a good many soldiers in our family; and they have brought home things from all parts of the world; so that there is a considerable jumble—Canada,

Spain, Egypt, China, India, every place on the globe, I fancy, where English regiments have been——"

"But the hall?" said she, with a little touch of disappointment.

"Oh, the hall is entirely Highland—there, I think, you will be satisfied. And as our friends here have been trying to interest you in the '45 rising, you will find a good many curiosities belonging to that period. By-the-way," he added, "I have one or two relics of that time that I'm afraid don't honestly and entirely belong to me. As you have never been in Scotland, I suppose you never heard of Fassiefern House——?"

"Oh, yes," said she, modestly. "Wasn't that where the younger brother of Lochiel lived, when he came out and tried to persuade Lochiel not to go and join the Prince?"

He looked at her with some surprise; he did not know how this young lady had been drilled.

"Precisely," said he, "that was John Cameron of Fassiefern, whose great-grand-daughter is at this moment Superior of Fort William. Well, perhaps you know also that a few days after Prince Charlie raised his standard at the head of Loch Sheil, he came along Glenfinnan, and put up at Fassiefern

House, passing the night there. That, of course, is quite enough for the Highlanders: a house that lodged the Young Chevalier is a sacred kind of thing, with all its contents. And I think they might have left Fassiefern alone. It was a pretty old-fashioned place, half-smothered in ivy—though it had been used as a farm-house for a long time back. But a year or two ago it seems it was wanted; I was told it had to be rebuilt for some reason or another; and in the process of tearing down and putting up again the old woodwork appears to have been either thrown out or given to any chance-comer. And very curious some of it is. I have a piece of curved balustrade that is made up of thin slices of wood that must have been spliced and put together with great labour; I suppose in those days—and in those parts—they had no other way of bending wood. That is one piece. Then I have one or two of the balusters; and a very quaint little frame for a mirror, in oak. The fact is, these things were being freely handed about in the neighbourhood; and a friend of mine, happening to pass through at the time, picked up a few of them, and sent them on to Inverfask for safe keeping. I fear I have no strong title to them; but they will be preserved, at

least; and I think if Fassiefern House had been mine, I should have preserved that intact also. By-the-way, Miss Rosslyn," he continued—still addressing himself to the tall young lady, while Queen Tita kept rummaging among mouldy old sconces, inlaid tea-trays, dower-chests, and the like, "I heard you say something the other day about these actual things being very interesting to you, as bringing historical times and events much more near, and making them seem real. Well, now, here was the house that Prince Charles lodged in just after he had raised his standard in Glenfinnan; and these were actually part of the house; and if you would care to take one or other of these bits of curiosities home with you to America—— "

"Oh, no, no, Colonel Cameron!—I could not think of such a thing—why, they are quite invaluable!" she exclaimed at once; and the hot blood sprang to her face.

"Not as something to remind you of Inverfask, and the West Highlands, and your visit?" said he, in his gentle way. "I won't ask you to take the piece of twisted balustrade —though that more certainly formed part of the house than anything else; because it would be cumbrous, and I don't see what you

could make of it. But the little oak frame —it is very quaint and obviously very old: I think, Miss Rosslyn, we will persuade you to accept that, when we are all at Inverfask together."

And little it was that the small woman hunting there among pots and pans knew of what had been going on. No doubt she thought we three bystanders were idly talking of indifferent matters, or perhaps having a little amusement over the eagerness of her search. Had she learned that Colonel Cameron had just pressed on the acceptance of this young American lady one of the treasures of Inverfask House; and that Miss Peggy had tacitly consented to accept it as a souvenir of her forthcoming visit to his place in the Highlands, perhaps the curiosity hunter would not have been quite so easy in her mind. For it was with great equanimity that she now proceeded to collect her purchases, and to pay for them, and give instructions about their being forwarded to London; and it was with a light heart that she took Peggy's arm and marched her out of the shop, saying we should just have time to get a cup of tea or something of that kind before walking along to the theatre.

And perhaps it was owing to our early arrival, or perhaps to the fineness of the summer evening outside, that when we entered the spacious, dimly-lit building, we found ourselves entirely alone. Not even the orchestra had as yet put in an appearance. Our footsteps had a hollow sound as we went down to the front of the dress-circle, and surveyed this large and dusky and empty place. Indeed, one could not help sympathising with those poor fellows of musicians, who, as they came in, glanced up at the rows of empty benches. Gloomy and phantasmal as the great hollow hall appeared, they were probably thinking that this was not the kind of house that caused the ghost to walk on Saturday. And yet, when they once began, their interest in their own professional work seemed in no wise lessened by this sorry sight. They played with abundant spirit; and, what is more, they played very good music—not the usual poker-and-tongs orchestra-rattle; but an exceedingly pretty waltz. Then, attracted by the sound, stragglers began to appear—in the pit, in the gallery. Matters were mending somewhat. A further raising of the lights cheered us. More stragglers appeared; there was going to be a semblance

of an audience, after all. And impatiently we waited for the upwinding of the curtain.

"Now, my dear Peggy," said Queen Tita to her neighbour, "if you're in luck, you'll find here the drama in its pristine simplicity —and vigour, too. You won't be asked to 'follow the subjective Miss from Boston to the banks of Nile.' You'll have a villain that is a villain; and faithful love rewarded in the end; and virtue entirely triumphant. You'll see what appeals to the popular heart. Let it be a lesson to you——"

But here the curtain was raised, and talking had to cease. And very soon it became apparent that Miss Peggy was in quite superlative luck; for this story that was being told her was constructed of the most simple and yet substantial materials. Here was the anguished heroine who clings to her lover in spite of his poverty; here was the ruthless parent who casts her forth and bids her wed the misery that he prophesies for her; her lover—now her husband—battling with misfortune and cruel fate, and appealing to Heaven to protect his young and innocent wife; and, finally, a ruffian sworn to accomplish all manner of diabolical deeds, but in especial to capture and carry off the heroine,

who had scorned his hateful advances. Just a horrible villain this one was, and he took no pains to conceal it; for, like the rest of the characters, he from time to time came down to the footlights, and in a telling speech revealed the secret workings of his soul. There was plenty of action besides; there were quite thrilling situations; and invariably the persons in the play addressed each other by both Christian and surname—"Gregory Hammond, you shall suffer for this!" "Beware, Richard Merreton!" and so forth — and everyone knows how impressive that is. Then the story proceeds apace; misfortunes accumulate upon the hapless pair; the stern parent remains inexorable; the dark-visaged scoundrel matures his plans; and the end of the act is truly most pitiful—for the villain shoots the father and has the guilt laid upon the young husband, who is forthwith hurried off to prison, leaving his suffering young wife and her infant babe at the mercy of a cruel world.

It seems hardly befitting the dignity of the legitimate drama that we should now have been treated, as an interlude, to a "variety entertainment." But there is a reason for all things.

"You see, Miss Peggy," one explains to

this young stranger from the West, "when a play is played right off, or when you read a book straight through, you are apt to forget what spaces of time divide the parts; and you don't give proper value to the constancy of the lover or the faithfulness of his mistress. Now just remember, while all this dancing and fiddling is going on, that the young husband is suffering penal servitude for a murder he never committed; and the young mother is driven to distraction by the kidnapping of her child; while the villain, who is responsible for all this, is having a gay time of it with the old man's money—plovers' eggs and Schloss Johannisberger for breakfast, no doubt. That is precisely what makes it hard—that the suffering of the good people should last such a long time. Besides, you may have several excellent performers in your company whom you can't get into this play: why shouldn't they have a chance of showing what they can do?"

"Oh, I don't object in the least," she says. "It's like a cigarette between the courses at dinner."

"And what do you know about that?"

"I have heard of it," she says vaguely.

However, when the drama was resumed,

the action moved forward with astonishing rapidity. Again and again the heroine was on the point of being carried off by that desperate villain; and again and again, at the precise moment wanted, behold her husband! —who, it seems, has escaped from prison, and appears to be roaming about the country at large. But swift-footed Fate is now behind that deep-plotting scoundrel. All at once everybody appears on the scene; the officers of the law, instead of arresting the escaped prisoner, clap the manacles on the villain's wrists and march him off (a long farewell to plovers' eggs and Johannisberger!); the hero's innocence is triumphantly proved; the kidnapped child is restored to the joyful mother; and husband and wife are once more united, with every possible kind of felicity showered on their heads. In short, virtue wins all along the line; and wickedness and treachery and villainy are sent to the right about—relegated to a prison cell, in fact. We were quite glad; and we told Miss Peggy it was a solemn warning she should remember all her life; but when it came to be a question as to whether we should remain and see the extravaganza that was to follow, we thought we had had enough of the theatre for one evening, and so

we went back to the Unicorn Hotel and to supper.

Late that night the miniature Manageress of this wandering party was in her own room, engaged in overhauling her millinery purchases of the day, and disposing them so as to admit of their being packed on the morrow. She seemed a little thoughtful, and was mostly silent; but, at length, she said, in a cautious sort of way—

"Do you know what Peggy told me before we went to the theatre this evening?"

"I do not."

"She told me, that Colonel Cameron had promised to give her some relic from Fassiefern House—a little mirror, I believe."

"I was aware of it."

She looked up quickly.

"Oh, you knew?" And then she said, rather slowly, and with no great air of conviction—indeed, she seemed questioning instead of asserting—"I suppose that is nothing. Oh, of course not. It is an interesting thing for an American girl to take home with her—especially when coming from Inverfask: a souvenir, that is all. And he has been very kind to her. Oh, no, I would not attach too much importance to his making her a little

present; and—and, of course, she will value it!"

And yet, somehow, she does not seem quite satisfied in her own mind. The millinery does not receive much of her attention. Finally, she turns from the table altogether.

"Do be frank, now!—tell me!" she says—in a half-pleading, half-frightened way. "Have you noticed anything? Don't you think that Colonel Cameron's admiration for Peggy is just a little too marked? And she herself, too—have you noticed the way in which she speaks of him? Oh, good gracious, I have been trying to shut my eyes and ears; but if anything—if anything were to happen between these two—and me responsible——!"

"But how are you responsible?" one says to this incoherent person.

"We brought them together—isn't that enough?" she exclaims. "And there he is, a widower, twice her age at least, with an encumbered estate; and I suppose hardly anything beyond his pay. Think what her people would say of it! They wouldn't see any romance in it; they wouldn't find any fascination in her becoming Lady Cameron, of Inverfask, and living up there in the North and winning the affection and gratitude of

those poor people—which is quite clearly what Sir Ewen was talking about to-day. What do you suppose they care for the traditions of the Highland clans—or for Colonel Cameron's reputation as a soldier, either? I suppose they never heard of the V.C. They would want to know how many dollars a year he had, and what he was going to settle on her! I'm sure I never thought such a thing possible, or I would never have suggested his coming. Of course," she adds, in contrite confession, though she is clearly very much perturbed and bewildered, "I thought she would admire him. I wanted her to do that. And I knew he would find her a pleasant companion. But just think what this would be for both of them! Why, it's madness! He ought to marry a rich woman, if he marries at all; and get Inverfask cleared of its burdens, and live there. And she *must* marry someone with money——"

"I think you will find that Peggy will marry the man she wants to marry without taking your advice or the advice of anyone else."

"Oh, it isn't advice—nor for worlds would I give her advice about such a thing," says this small creature, in quite evident distress.

"It's the responsibility of having brought them together. With Mr. Duncombe that would have been entirely different. I was safe there, whatever happened. And that's the only thing to be done now—if there is any chance of such a foolish infatuation——"

"What is the only thing to be done?"

"Why, to beg Mr. Duncombe to come back to us, and at once! I never was quite positively certain why he went away; but if it was merely through some little quarrel or misunderstanding, I dare say they would be inclined now to forget it. In any case, his presence would make a great difference; if she has any sense at all, she would naturally turn to the younger man, with all his advantages."

"And what's to be done with the Colonel?"

"I suppose he will go back to Aldershot," she says wistfully. "I am sorry—but—but anything rather than this. And even if he stays, Mr. Duncombe's being with us will make all the difference in the world. He is an older friend of Peggy's; she seemed to like him very well; and he was so attentive to her; and—and she found him amusing. She can't help seeing his advantages. She would know there would be no opposition on

the part of her family. I will even confess that I thought it might turn out a match between Mr. Duncombe and herself; not that I particularly wished any such thing; but it seemed so suitable; and they got on very well together; and I knew that I was safe enough, whatever happened. Do write and beg him to come! He said he would, if it was in any way possible. My gracious, if this other thing were to happen, what would those people in America think of me!"

"They wouldn't think anything at all about you—whatever were to happen. You imagine they don't understand Peggy by this time? And here is another point. Supposing there were some such possibility as you suggest—supposing there were some kind of understanding between these two—though I am certain there is nothing of the sort, at present—do you fancy that Ewen Cameron is the kind of man who would allow himself to be interfered with? You are always talking of the gentleness of the Camerons. Well, they may be as gentle-mannered as most folk; but they have wills of their own, some of them. Did you never hear of the message that Sir Allan Cameron of Earrachd sent to George III.—or IV., was it?—when it was proposed

to break up the 79th Highlanders—the regiment that Cameron of Earrachd had raised and commanded all through the Peninsular campaign? It was a pretty message to send to a King."

"What was it?"

"The proposal was to draft the Cameron Highlanders out to India, to make up the ranks of certain regiments that had been thinned there. '*Tell the King from me*,'—this was the message that Sir Allan Cameron sent—'*that he may order the 79th to hell, and I will march at their head; but draft them he dare not and shall not.*" A very pretty message to be sent to the King of England!"

"I will tell that to Peggy in the morning," observed Mrs. Threepenny-bit, reflectively—as if, at such a juncture, it was necessary, or even prudent, to say anything to still further stimulate Miss Peggy's interest with regard to the Clan Cameron.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Sabrina fair,
Listen where thou art sitting
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,
In twisted braids of lilies knitting
The loose train of thy amber-drooping hair;
Listen for dear honour's sake,
Goddess of the silver lake,
Listen, and save."

Moreover, the counsels of the night only increased her fears; and by next morning she had quite convinced herself that, unless some immediate measures were taken, Miss Peggy would persist in her folly, and end by marrying a beggar. A beggar, indeed! When the fair Mistress Lindsay was wooed and won and carried away from Edinburgh city by young Donald of the Isles—who had successfully concealed from her his high estate—she was, no doubt, agreeably surprised when he took her up to a mountain and bade her look abroad on the islands and castles

and domains of which she was now to be lady and queen. Well, we live in less romantic days; but one could not help thinking that, even if the dreaded thing were to happen, Miss Peggy might not be altogether disappointed when she came in sight of Inverfask House. A moor yielding to two guns and fair shooting some five-and-thirty brace on the Twelfth, and—with proper management—good for eight or ten brace on an off day during the remainder of the season; a loch with abundance of brown trout, and with sea-trout running to four or five pounds; an extensive, if not over-productive farm; to say nothing of the plantations and "policies" surrounding the house itself, and rights of salmon-fishing for some miles along the coast: these seem to make a very comfortable provision for a beggar. But what was the use of discussing this fantastic impossibility?

"She is simply at her tricks again—she can't help it," one says to this anxious-eyed mite of a creature. "And as for Cameron, of course he likes to have a pretty girl to talk to: what soldier doesn't?"

"It isn't tricks at all," she says. "I know quite well when Peggy is merely playing pranks—I've seen her at it too often. But

this is entirely different; her imagination seems to have been taken captive—you can see that in the interest she displays about the smallest matter connected with Scotland, or the Highland people, or the Highland regiments, for the matter of that; and then, she is so obedient and submissive; she isn't pretending to be a very, very proper young lady—with a wink at you when she gets the chance; it is real this time, or else I am mistaken, and I hope I am. And as for him, well, I hope I am mistaken there too; but his regard for her seems to be most marked—the quiet satisfaction he appears to have in her society—and the good-humoured toleration—encouragement, even, he has for all her wilfulness—— "

"Why, how long is it since he first set eyes on her!" one says, by way of protest against this ridiculous fancy.

"Oh, that is nothing," she answers. "A single day of this companionship is worth a whole London season."

"But even if it were true, where would be the harm?" one naturally asks. "Cameron is very far from being penniless."

"He is five-and-forty, if he is a day!" she exclaims.

"How often must I point out to you that at five-and-forty a man is just at the prime of his manhood—the very prime of his physical and intellectual strength?"

"Of course *you* say that," she retorts. "But ten years ago you said the same of five-and-thirty."

"And haven't I ten years' more wisdom to add to my judgment? I tell you now it is five-and-forty. And I say that Ewen Cameron is in his prime. Mind you, he can make a poor thing of some of the young fellows when they are out on the hill: I've seen more than one of them pretty well dead-beat by lunch-time—on the far tops at Achnashealach, I mean; and then you'd find the Cornel, instead of sitting down to the cold beef and the whisky-and-water, merely take out his pipe, and lounge up and down, trying to make out which was Ben-a-vuick and which Ben Dearg. How India did not take more out of him it's hard to understand; but I suppose he is one of those firm-knit, fatless creatures that nothing seems to touch."

These details do not seem to interest this preoccupied person.

"If they had ever met before, at someone else's house," she said absently. "But it will

look as if we had expressly asked him to join our party, to—to bring this about. And how could we have dreamt of such a thing? Peggy knows as well as anyone else what her people expect of her; she has almost told me as much—though she is not very communicative about such affairs——"

"Well, now, you see the result of cherishing historical prejudices and partisanships," one points out to her. "If you had only reconciled yourself to Jack Duncombe's project of making Charles Edward the dark foil to the heroic qualities of Alfieri, what would be the state of affairs now? Why, by this time, the book, or the play, whichever it was to be, would have been half done; and those young people would have been engaged to be married—as sure as ever was; and the mamma and papa in Brooklyn would be regarding you as the guardian angel of their daughter. Instead of which, here is an impecunious and elderly soldier, whom you yourself invited to come along; and you are worrying yourself to death because you think he is going to carry Peggy away to live on oatmeal and skim-milk in the Highlands.'

"I suppose you think it is a joke?" she demands indignantly.

"I do."

"Well, it is not. You don't know Peggy as I know her; or rather, when you are near her, you are blinded and fascinated like the rest of the men, and you don't notice anything—you don't see anything except her eyes. But I do. And this has frightened me. The only thing is, it can't have gone very far; and I daresay, if we could get Mr. Duncombe to come back to the boat, she would return to her senses. For she *has* common-sense; she is a remarkably shrewd young woman. And then, seeing the two of them together, how could she help contrasting them? Mr. Duncombe has every advantage. He is nearer her own age; he will have plenty of money; and he is good-looking and amusing enough. Of course I am not comparing him with Colonel Cameron—except as a suitable match for Peggy; far from it; Colonel Cameron is a much finer stamp of man than Mr. Duncombe — to my thinking he is worth a dozen of any of the young men we know. But that isn't the question. I am thinking what her people in Brooklyn would say about it all—and about us. Now, will you write to Mr. Duncombe?"

"If you like."

"Will you telegraph?"

"If you like."

"Supposing he can get away, there are plenty of towns where he could join us. Tewkesbury——"

"Not Tewkesbury—we shall be there to-day."

"Gloucester, then. You know," she added eagerly, "how anxious he was to go down that open part of the Severn with us—to see how the boat would answer. He is sure to come along if you urge him."

"And shall I ask him to bring the Alfieri play with him?"

"He will not be so ill-mannered," said she, somewhat stiffly, "as to talk disrespectfully or cruelly of the unfortunate Prince Charles before one of the Camerons; I think I can trust him for that."

"And you may trust me for this—that, if he did, Colonel Cameron wouldn't care the fifteenth part of a brass farthing."

"I am not so sure," said she.

Now, when all were together again in the coffee-room of this Worcester hotel, one naturally now and again glanced at Miss Peggy to gather from her demeanour towards Colonel Cameron whether there were any

grounds for Queen Tita's suspicions. But nothing of the sort was visible. She was in an unusually merry mood. So far from there being anything of the love-lorn maiden about her, she was neither more nor less than the wilful wretch whose sauciness and cantrips we had had to put up with all this time; nay, it was on this very occasion that her impertinence reached a point which demands serious notice. At breakfast, Queen Tita, who had just been reading her letters from home, was discoursing to Sir Ewen Cameron about her two boys, their wonderful qualities, ambitions,* and all the rest of it; while the father of those lads, having some small regard for the truth, was endeavouring to mitigate this panegyric by a few mild protests. But the truth was not acceptable—it seldom is; Madam grew more and more annoyed; Miss Peggy professed to sympathise with her deeply; and at last the younger woman reached over for a sheet of music she had purchased the previous day, scribbled some-

* Their ambitions! If they have any ambition beyond that of getting so mauled at football that their own mother can hardly recognise them when they come home at night, they have so far been most successful in concealing it from the rest of the world.

thing on the outside of it, and handed it to her friend. Now this of itself was a piece of downright rudeness—though, probably, it was the presence of the Colonel that had stilled her flippant tongue; but it was not until several days thereafter—and when we were on board again—that one happened accidentally to pick up this sheet of music and discover what she had pencilled on it. These were the words:—"Full fathom five *that* father lies!" Now, not only was this a monstrous perversion of the text of Shakespeare, it was also a gross mis-statement of fact: the only thing it proved being that a young woman given over to such unseemly jesting was in no parlous case as regarded her heart, or what she might consider her heart.

We had a busy morning before us; for, of course, we could not set about such a serious undertaking as the navigation of the Severn without having the ship fully provisioned and equipped for all emergencies. And what did this giddy-headed school-girl know about paraffin oil, candles, soda-water, two-shilling novels, fresh vegetables, preserved fruits, pigeon-pies, towing-ropes, stationery, telegraph-forms, and a hundred other things

that had to be thought of? We bade her go about her business and bother us no more. And then, Colonel Cameron remarking that he thought of walking along to seek out some spot from which he could get a better notion of the disposition of Cromwell's and Fleetwood's forces before the battle of Worcester, she turned to him, and asked him if he was likely to be passing by the cathedral, for that she would like to see again a rose-red hawthorn-tree that she had remarked on the previous day, and that she thought was the most beautiful thing she had met with in England. Of course he instantly offered to escort her, and these two went away; while Mrs. Threepenny-bit (whatever she may have thought of that arrangement) had now to resume her consultations with Murdoch, in the hall of the hotel.

It was not, however, until past mid-day that the four of us, idly lounging about and waiting by the banks of the Severn—at the spot where the canal debouches into the river—beheld that long white Noah's Ark of a thing slowly approaching. When she came into the last lock we got on board; and, having seen that the additional towing-line was attached, and the longest poles ready, we awaited the opening

of the great gates. A pleasanter day for our entrance upon the Severn we could not have demanded. There was a soft southerly wind blowing up stream, ruffling the wide yellow waters, and stirring the foliage on the high wooded bank; on the other shore the flat golden-green meadows were glowing in the sunlight; and far beyond them—and beyond some darker lines of elms—the pale blue Malvern hills rose into the shining silvery sky. A brisk and breezy day, sufficiently warm and sufficiently cool; altogether an auspicious setting forth.

And yet, when at length we found ourselves out in the wide current, it was clear that we were to have some unexpected experiences. For one thing, the river was in flood; and the wind, blowing up against the heavy yellow stream, raised a considerable bit of a sea; so that very soon the Nameless Barge was plunging and dipping in a most unusual manner. Queen Tita burst out laughing.

"What's the matter now?" asks the steersman.

"I've heard of a bluebottle pretending to be a bee," she says; "but I never heard of an old canal-boat pretending to be a yacht."

"It's all very well: I suppose you have left

heaps of shawls and music and books lying about the saloon, and doubtless the water is spouting in at those bull's-eyes at the bow——"

"Oh, my gracious!" she cries, and is off in an instant.

"And you, Miss Peggy," one continues, "you'd better go and find Murdoch and ask him to see that there are no loose wine-glasses lying about."

"Oh, certainly," she says (for she is a biddable lass when she is not bent on mischief), and she, too, disappears.

However, our adventuring forth into this raging ocean was a small matter. A more serious thing was this. The bargeman's rule of the road is "business first and pleasure after": that is to say, in passing each other, business barges take the inside, and pleasure ones the outside, the latter getting their towing-lines over smoke-stacks and piled hay as best they can. Now the tow-path at this part of the Severn runs high along the side of a steep bank; we had necessarily a long line out; and if, in putting our craft into midstream to pass the barges coming north, her head yawed over to the western shore—which it was very apt to do with this heavy flood

astern—that was invariably the moment chosen by our Horse-Marine, who was riding, to urge forward his charger. The inevitable consequence was a sudden and savage wrench, and a tilt over that set the plates dancing and the women (inside the saloon) screaming; and that threatened to plunge the whole lot of us into Sabrina's tawny wave. But all the same, we made such excellent progress that every now and again the Horse-Marine indulged in a little trot, which was quite inspiriting to behold. We passed the mouth of the Teme; we glided swiftly along by Beauchamp Court and Kempsey; we swept round by Cliffy Wood and Farm; and on by Severnstoke and Severn End. This was a singularly English-looking landscape through which we were passing—the high, red bank above the wide rippling river; the poplars and alders all trembling and rustling in the soft breeze; along the margin of the stream, yellow-grey reeds and grey-green willows; silver-white clouds crossing the spacious sky, with here and there a glimpse of blue; finally, at the horizon, the pale line of the Malvern Hills —those far heights on which Caractacus and his brave Silures entrenched themselves and made their last determined and despairing

stand against the Roman legions. Very peaceful now appeared this smiling and cultivated plain. It seemed hard to believe that it was through these very fields close by that Fleetwood's horse had to make their way before they came up with the Royalist troops, and drove them, "from hedge to hedge," back into Worcester town.

The two women returned with their report: not a drop of water had come in by the bull's-eyes or anywhere else; while all was secure in the lockers.

"I'm just in love with this boat," observes Miss Peggy.

"Children are easily pleased," answers her hostess—who shares Murdoch's covert opinion about our noble craft.

"I believe she could cross to America!" the young lady continues.

"So she could," the other says, with bitter irony, "if she were properly lashed on to the deck of a White Star Liner."

"Say, now, where is the part of the Severn you've always been talking about as something to be feared?"

"Oh! that's away down south—from Sharpness to Bristol; that is where you get into the open estuary," the steersman answers her.

"And will there be any danger?"

"What a question! Danger in a boat capable of crossing the Atlantic!"

"Oh, don't imagine that I shall be afraid!" the young lady says promptly. "At least, I hope not. If I am, I'll conceal it to the best of my ability."

"I don't think you are likely to show much fright," said Colonel Cameron, looking at her with an approving eye. "Especially as you will be quite prepared—you will have time to screw up your courage beforehand. It's sudden danger that unnerves people. I remember the most awful fright I ever got in my life—well, fright is a feeble word: the paralysing sensation of fear was so bewildering——"

"You!" said Miss Peggy. "Why——"

But she could not tell the man to his face that it was impossible for her to believe that he had ever been afraid of anything.

"It was at a small inn in the Highlands," said he, "where I had put up for some salmon-fishing. Shall I tell you the story?—it's the only ghost-story I've got. Very well. I was there all by myself at the time; and very happy, too—capital sport during the day; snug quarters in the evening. One night I

had dined as usual, and had drawn my chair in front of a blazing peat-fire, lit a pipe, and got a book. No, Miss Rosslyn, I didn't fall asleep and dream my ghost; just you wait. I was reading on in a dead silence; for at the back of the inn, where my sitting-room was, there was nothing but fields; all the traffic at Altnaharra goes on in front. Besides it was getting late. Well, I was reading away in this absolute silence when of a sudden I heard a sigh just behind me—or a groan, rather—I was so startled by the extraordinary sound that I couldn't tell which it was. Of course I wheeled round in an instant—and there—right before me—was an enormous head, with two staring eyes and two large horns. Talk about fright!—this was simply a paralysis of sensation altogether. When it is a man who startles you, and you wheel round angrily, your first impulse is to strike; but this thing was certainly not a man. Not a man—I should think not—simply an enormous head and huge eyes and nostrils—motionless, too—absolutely motionless—but the eyes glaring. Fright?—I wonder I am alive. And then, just as quickly, the explanation flashed in upon my mind: it was the head of a cow. I had left the lower sash of the window open, to

let out the peat-smoke; the sitting-room was on the ground-floor; this beast had got loose somehow, and wandered round from the byre, attracted by the light, I suppose. When I went forward to it, it still kept staring; then it withdrew its head, with another snort; and then I could see its dark bulk going along in the direction of the farm-yard. There—that is my only ghost story."

"But just suppose it had been an old woman who was sitting there," said Queen Tita. "Why, she would have run away through the house shrieking and declaring that the devil had just appeared to her."

"My impression is," he said, "that an old Highland-woman would have been more familiar with a cow's eyes and horns. It was the enormous size of the head that bewildered me—being so near—and nothing visible but itself. I suppose, now," he continued, as we were gaily careering down this wide river, "it is really possible for a man to frighten a bull by stooping and staring at it from between his legs. But does the bull forget that it saw the man upright—that he is a man, indeed? I remember a friend of mine telling me how he and a companion of his had been out shooting somewhere in the Highlands, and on

their way home they had to cross a field that had been partly ploughed. In the fallow part of the field a bull had been turned loose. They paid no heed to him—that is the best way in all circumstances, I believe, if only the brute will let you—and thought that they were going to get past all right; but they soon perceived that he meant mischief. Indeed, there was no mistake about it; and my friend made tracks for a stone dyke, over which he clambered with his gun in his hand. Not so his companion. Perhaps he was afraid to make a run for it—or he was ashamed—or determined to give proof of his courage; however, he put his gun on the ground, turned his back to the bull, stooped down, and glared at the animal from between his legs ——"

"And that was enough to frighten the beast away!" said Mrs. Threepenny-bit quickly.

"Oh, was it?" observed the narrator, with grim placidity. "No, it was not. Quite the reverse, in fact. The bull came at him like a live tornado—caught him one, as the saying is—and the next moment he was rolling head over heels—like a cheese—along a ploughed furrow ——"

"And killed?"

"No, not killed. When he picked himself

up, there was a plough near, and he dodged behind that; but in the meantime the bull was engaged in trampling his gun to bits with its fore feet—and so he made his escape. They say he has less faith now in rustic traditions."

"He was not a personal friend of yours?" one ventures to ask.

"No."

"You only heard of him?"

"That was all."

"Was your friend who told you the story a person of strict veracity?"

"Like other people, I suppose. But what then? Oh, I see. The witness may stand down?"

"Yes, you may go. The Court expresses no opinion."

A most beautiful river the Severn surely is; and on this mellow afternoon the wind had mostly died away; so that the high red banks, all hanging in foliage, were faithfully mirrored on the smooth surface of the stream, save where some chance puff would come along, breaking the oily russets and olive-greens with a keen shaft of blue—the colour of the overhead sky. Subjects for a water-colour painter formed themselves at every turn and

winding; and at last, when we came in sight of the square grey tower of Tewkesbury Abbey, just visible above the trees, and the ruddy houses of the town appearing here and there beyond the warm green meadows—the tower and houses and meadows and trees all aglow in the light streaming over from the western skies—we began to think that too much had Avon and Thames and Kennet occupied our artists, and that some of them whom we knew and could name might do worse than pitch their tents more frequently just a little further west.

Now came the question as to where we should moor for the night—some snug place where we could make surely fast, and defy this swollen current. We had no need to go on to the town; for we had abundant supplies on board; indeed, we usually refused the shelter of wharves and basins unless, for some reason, we wanted to put up at an hotel, and wished to have the boat within convenient distance. We finally pitched upon a nook under a steep red bank—the Royal Hill it is called—where there were some stout willow-bushes close down by the water; and when we had run our gallant vessel in among these, and fastened her securely both stem and stern,

Captain Columbus was free to go off in search of lodgings for himself and the Horse-Marine. Our first experience of the Severn had been most satisfactory. The Nameless Barge had done everything that could have been expected of her. We began to look forward to Sharpness Point without any overwhelming anxiety.

At dinner that evening we refrained from lighting the lamps, the twilight without being so singularly beautiful. It was in the earlier manner of Mr. W. L. Wyllie, so to speak. The wide smooth surfaces of the water were breadths of pale saffron and exquisite lilac-grey reflected from an opalescent sky; there were warm olive-green shadows under the opposite bank; and then, as it happened, there was a withered tree on that shore, and the mirrored black stem and leafless branches came right down to the middle of the stream. A single crimson line in the purple-blue of the west told of the sinking sun. The birds were still singing—somewhere in our neighbourhood—probably among the bushes over the steep red hill behind us. But it was the river that chiefly claimed our attention—the tender and ethereal and softly merging colours, the palely changing lights: each window framed a picture, as the day died out of the world.

And when at last it grew so dark that we had to have recourse to lamps and candles, we knew quite well that in the clear dark-blue heavens overhead the first silver-points of the stars were beginning to throb.

Now, all this time Queen Tita had said not a word about the possible coming of Jack Duncombe; perhaps she feared that the mere suggestion might be construed by Colonel Cameron into a hint that he should vacate his berth. That was not so, as it happened; nevertheless his offer to quit was sufficiently prompt.

"Oh, Peggy," said she, that night after dinner, in an off-hand kind of fashion, "would you be surprised to find an old friend coming to join us at Gloucester?"

Miss Peggy glanced up in rather a frightened fashion—for Colonel Cameron was also sitting out here in the warm, still night, contentedly smoking his cigar. Queen Tita caught sight of that quick look—the glow from the open door of the saloon falling full on the girl's face.

"No," said she, gravely, "it isn't Mr. A'Beckett. It is strange we have heard nothing of him of late. You haven't heard, Peggy?"

"No," said Miss Peggy, instantly. "Why should I?"

"Oh, well, I thought he might have some more information to send you," her hostess remarked, in a general kind of way. "I don't think we study the guide-books as closely as we ought. However, it isn't Mr. A'Beckett. It's Mr. Duncombe."

"Oh, indeed," said Miss Peggy. "That will be very nice."

"I am not sure he is coming," she continued, "but we have telegraphed to him; and you know how anxious he was to see how the boat would answer in going down the Severn. So I shouldn't be surprised to find him turning up at Gloucester."

"In that case," said Colonel Cameron, with perfect good humour, "I must clear out. I shall hate him heartily, I know, but still I've had my turn——"

"Oh, no, no, not at all," Queen Tita said at once, and most anxiously. "Surely if this caravanserai of a thing has any recommendation it ought to be able to take in another passenger, and easily. Why should not one of you gentlemen sleep in the saloon? Murdoch can make up an extra bed—he has often had to do that for us on other boats; and all

that is necessary will be for you to choose amongst yourselves which is the earliest riser. What can be simpler than that?"

"And then his being on board would come in so well just now," observed Miss Peggy, with demure eyes. "There would be Captain Columbus, Murdoch, Mr. Duncombe, Colonel Cameron, you two, myself—yes, that would just be right—we could take for our motto, 'We are Severn.'"

"Peggy," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, severely, "this is business: I won't be interrupted by your irresponsible frivolity. Well, now, supposing Mr. Duncombe should be able to join us, he is the newcomer, and should take his chance——"

"But I have had my turn of the cabin," Colonel Cameron remonstrated, "and I assure you I shall be most comfortable in the saloon. I should call the whole arrangement the height of luxury——"

"But your things are all in your cabin, and why should they be disturbed, Sir Ewen?" said she—and who is bold enough to dispute her will when her farthing rushlight of a mind shows us clearly what it is?—"Mr. Duncombe was always an early riser. He used to get up and see that everything was arranged about

the boat and the day's travelling by the time the rest of us were ready for breakfast. Peggy used to get up early, too," the fiend continued, regarding the younger lady with a sweet and affectionate look. "She was studying English history at that time—Runnymede and King John, Guy of Warwick, and Piers Gaveston, and the rest of them; and the seclusion of the morning is good for study. She seems to have left off lately; but I suppose she will take it up again when we get to Gloucester or Bristol. Is there any English history connected with Bristol? If there isn't, Chatterton will do. Or the introduction of bird's-eye tobacco. Or the three sailors of Bristol city—indeed, anything will do, when Peggy is bent on acquiring information. But in the meantime, Sir Ewen, you are in possession of the cabin; it would be a great pity for you to move your things——"

"Just as you please," said he, "though I don't know that it is wholesome training for a soldier to find himself fixed in such comfortable quarters. However, you must promise me one thing—that the moment you find me in the way, you will tell me."

"Oh, yes, I will tell you," said she, with a little laugh (and apparently she had now quite abandoned any hope or wish she may have

formed about his returning to Aldershot). "But you must not make fun of us, Sir Ewen. Everyone knows how fastidious officers are. Well, I don't wonder at it. Both they and their men suffer sufficient privation in time of war; and it is but natural that when they come home they should expect to be well treated. But everyone says that the military clubs are just the perfection of management; and when the officers of a regiment give a ball, the supper is sure to be most sumptuous; and then about their own dinners—well, I have heard how particular they are——"

"And you know why they have to be particular about such things—and why they look after the affairs of their club?" said he. "It's because they're so poor. It's only the rich political fellows who can afford to let their club be managed anyhow. Oh, no, you mustn't blame us for being particular—you might even say that we are penurious——"

"Penurious?" said she. "Well, I don't know much about what the officers of other regiments may be; but I should say it was a charge not likely to be brought against the officers of the Highland regiments—at least, such of them as are Highlanders."—An amazing remark, if one thinks of it; because it was

quite irrelevant; and not only that, but it came from a person whose chief fear at the moment—as she professed, at least—was that the young lady under her care might be too strongly influenced in favour of these Highland people as here represented to her. However, Jack Duncombe was coming, we hoped; and that would cure all.

Then she said—

"I hope Murdoch is enjoying his night ashore. Captain Columbus looks the kind of man who would know how to order a good supper for them. And that reminds me: Peggy, you and I shall have to be butler to-night—will you come and help me? It's about soda-water time."

"Won't you let me help too?" said Colonel Cameron, rising to follow them into the saloon.

"Oh, yes, I will let you help," said she, cheerfully. "I always like you to mix my sleeping-draught for me, Sir Ewen—it is something recognisable then. As for poor Peggy, I don't know how she gets on at all. We haven't had any iced water on board since ever we started."

"Why, I haven't tasted iced water all the time I have been in England," said Miss Peggy,

indignantly. "I wouldn't. The ice in England isn't cold enough for a free-born American. Besides, I would rather go without it than be preached at."

"And what have they been saying to you, you poor dear?" observed Queen Tita—who was busy with tumblers, glasses, soda-water, cigar-boxes, spirit-stands, biscuit-boxes and the like, while the tall young lady was drawing the red curtains across the windows and making everything comfortable for the night. "Have they been wounding your sensitive soul? Well, never mind; preaching or no preaching, you leave ice water alone, and keep the June roses in your cheeks."

Then, when this small community was entirely and snugly shut in from the dark and silent world without, there was a vague hint ventured about a game of whist, or vingt-et-un, or something of that sort.

"We should have to clear all those things off the table," said Mrs. Threepenny-bit, regretfully, "and they are so handy. Peggy, why don't you bring out your banjo? What has made you so lazy? You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

The fact was, Miss Peggy had hardly ever touched her banjo since Colonel Cameron

came on board. Why, we hardly knew. We could perhaps have understood her not caring to ask us—before one who was comparatively a stranger to her—to join in any of her daft choruses; but there were plenty of the old-fashioned plantation songs, that suited her voice very well, and that have almost recovered from their vulgarisation of five-and-twenty years ago. Surely "Mary Blane" is pathetic in its simple way. "The Old Folks at Home" remains a favourite. There are many more; and we knew that she knew them; but somehow she had always seemed disinclined to open that leather case since Sir Ewen Cameron joined us. And so she was on this occasion.

"It is so delightfully quiet here," she said, "it is a shame to spoil it by that strumming."

"I am quite sure Colonel Cameron has never heard you sing 'Nelly Gray,'" Queen Tita suggested insidiously.

"And I should very much like to hear it," said he.

With that, she obediently went and got the banjo, and resumed her place on the couch; then, with a few rippling notes of prelude, she began to sing—

"There's a low green valley on the old Kentucky shore,
Where I've whiled many happy hours away—"

And very well she sang, too, if hardly with the confidence she usually displayed. And when she had finished, and when Queen Tita was begging her to sing "The Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane," Colonel Cameron said—

"Well, Miss Rosslyn, when I have the pleasure of receiving you two ladies in the north—when old Duncan—that is my factotum up there—gets your things out of the dog-cart, I shall be enormously disappointed if I don't see that yellow leather case amongst them."

She looked up suddenly.

"A banjo at Inverfask!" she exclaimed, in a kind of awe-stricken way—as though the incongruity was quite startling to her.

"Why not?" said he, simply.

And surely stranger things than that have happened in this odd mixture of a world.

END OF VOL. II.

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